

Homily of Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C, 2022

Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 138:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

The first reading is about the call of Isaiah, the second reading about the call of Paul and the gospel about the call of Peter, James and John.

The first reading narrates Isaiah's vision and encounter with the Lord: Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord and his angels. He acknowledged his sinfulness, "Woe to me ... For I am a man with unclean lips." To cleanse Isaiah of his sin, one of the angels took an ember from the altar fire and touched Isaiah's lips saying, "your wickedness is removed, your sin purged." The Lord said, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" Isaiah replied, "Here I am, ... send me."

Like Isaiah, Paul acknowledged his sinfulness. Paul said, "For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am, what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective" (1 Corinthians 15:9). We recall Paul's encounter with the Lord on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians, "a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him." He fell to the ground and was blind for three days. When Ananias prayed for him, "Immediately, things like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight." Thereafter, he became a chosen instrument of evangelization (Acts 9:1-19).

Peter, like Isaiah and Paul acknowledged his sinfulness. The gospel narrates Peter's experience: "[Jesus] said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.' Simon said in reply, 'Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.' ... When Simon Peter saw the massive catch, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.' For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.'"

God called Isaiah, Paul, Peter, James and John despite their unworthiness. God may be calling someone to priesthood, or to religious life, or serve in any of the ministries of the Church. The person may have all kinds of excuses. Someone can even go to the extent of wanting Jesus to depart, and leave him/her alone. Sometimes, we forget that when God calls, he gives the grace. St. Paul says, "by the grace of God I am, what I am." The same words apply to each one of us. All we need to do is to "put out into deep water" with faith and lower our nets for a catch. God does the rest.

God's call is not only to serve in the Church. God calls us to serve him and humanity in various assignments, responsibilities, and professions. We are, also, to accept these calls with faith. God calls us to various areas of life. He wants to make us his chosen instrument. He wants to make us fishers of men and women. All we need to do is to "put out into deep water" with faith and lower our nets for a catch. God does the rest.

There are several reasons why some people do not respond to God's call. There are people who have feelings of inadequacy. Their feelings and expressions are always "I can't." They do not put out into the deep. There are people who are afraid of failure. Putting out into the deep is too much a risk. There are people who settle for less. They are unable to put out into the deep because they lack aspiration. There are people who are very comfortable with the low bar they set for themselves. Putting out into the deep will disturb their comfort. There are people who are lazy. They lack energy to put out into the deep. There are people who are easily frustrated and discouraged. They are unable to persevere through the hitches and difficulties that go with putting out into the deep. There are people who lack the will power to pursue their vision. They remain at the level of dreams. They are unable to put out into the deep. There are people who are unable to put out into the deep because they live in the world of their ugly past. They must transcend their past in order to move forward. Then, they are able to put out into the deep.

Peter says, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing" (Luke 5:5). This means that when Jesus is absent, it is night; and no matter how hard we work, we catch nothing. Without him, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Jesus, may nothing separate us from you. May the angel of the Lord touch us with ember of fire to ignite us. Grant us your grace that we may become God's chosen instruments. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP