

Homily for 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD

Readings: Isa 6:1-2,3-8; Ps 137(138); 1 Cor 15:1-11; Lk 5:1-11

Theme: God calls, purifies and sends

From the famous passage of the call and commissioning of Isaiah, our first reading highlights a call, a purification and a sending out on a mission. Isaiah tells us he had this experience in the year King Uzziah died. King Uzziah was the son of King Amaziah of Judah, who ruled for 52 years. He was one of Judah's greatest kings, although God disciplined him for disobedience towards the end of his life (cf. 2 Chr 26:16-21). The verb to see, *ra'ah*, with the description of Lord sitting upon a high throne, his robe filling the *hekal*, that is, the temple, palace or sanctuary, implies that Isaiah saw a vision of the heavenly temple. There is no reference to an earthly temple throughout the narrative. In that temple, Isaiah sees seraphs with six wings. *Saraph* in Hebrew means 'to burn.' These were the fiery creatures around the throne of God, 'the burning ones,' which in Hebrew are also described as angelic beings. These angelic beings called out to one another, 'holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, His glory fills the whole earth.' This song of the angels is what we sing at Mass before we approach the Lord in Holy communion.

When Isaiah saw this sight, he knew he was in the presence of the divine, and his reaction was one of repentance. 'I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among people with unclean lips.' Yet, he has seen the King, the Lord of Hosts. Isaiah knew what the scripture says, that no man shall see God and live (cf. Exo 33:20). Peter will repeat the similar words in the gospel, 'depart from me Lord for I am a sinful man.' Then one of the seraphs, holding live coal, touched Isaiah's mouth, in that way purifying him from his iniquity. Nothing unclean shall come into the presence of God. But God had called Isaiah to experience this heavenly vision, and He purifies those He has called into His presence. They cannot stand before him on their own because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (cf. Rom 3:23). As soon as Isaiah was purified and the Lord asked, 'Whom shall I send?' He did not hesitate to take on the mission. The Lord has prepared him. We find a similar experience in the gospel.

In the gospel, Jesus calls his first disciples by the lake of Gennesaret to purify him and send them out to become fishers of men. This chapter begins a new pericope with the word *egeneto*, and it happened, which means Luke was beginning a new storyline about Jesus. This time Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, which is another name for the Sea of Galilee. And many people wanted to listen to the word of God and were pressing around him. Then he caught sight of two empty boats because the fishermen who owned them were washing their nets. So he got into one of the boats, and it was Simon's. He sat in it and taught the crowd from the boat. When he finished speaking to the crowd, he spoke to Simon, 'put out into the deep place and let down the nets for a catch.' Amazingly, a carpenter is telling a professional fisherman what to do. That was why Simon said, 'master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing.' As experienced fishermen, they knew the best time for fishing. With the water disturbed and so many people around the shore, they were likely to net any fish. But Simon was humble enough to take the counsel of Jesus. Note, he called him *epistates*, that is, master, commander, one recognized as having authority. He must have seen the authority behind the proclamation of the word of God by Jesus.

When they put out the net, they netted so much fish that their nets began to tear and had to call their companions to assist them. At this, Simon Peter fell to his knees, asking Jesus to depart from him for he is a sinful man. Just as the prophet Isaiah acknowledged his sinfulness before God, Peter confesses his worthlessness and sinfulness before the Lord. Earlier, Peter acknowledged that Jesus had authority. But, now he calls him Lord, *Kurios*, in Hebrew Adonai, which the people called in place of the name of God *Yhwh*, which they never

pronounced. Simon recognizes that he is in the presence of the divine. But Jesus did not detest Simon for confessing his sinfulness. But instead, he called him to follow him. Peter will learn from him and be purified for the mission of catching other men for God.

In the second reading, Paul is an example of one who knew how to catch men for God. St. Paul tells the Corinthians to accept the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus for their salvation and be open to God's grace leading us in our everyday life. But Paul reminds them that God calls, purifies, and sends those who proclaim the good news of salvation to the world. Paul could be considered unworthy of such privilege since he was a persecutor of Christians. So he said, "by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me has helped me to toil even harder than the others; it is not I, but the grace of God in me." So, God called him and empowered him to proclaim the Good News to others with His grace.