

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [C]

Isaiah 6: 1 - 8

1 Corinthians 15: 1 - 11

Luke 5: 1 - 11

All of today's readings are so rich, and beautiful as they open for us the different ways in which the Lord speaks to us and calls us, and our reaction to Him.

But what binds them together is the concept of vocation - a calling from God.

We so often use vocation to mean those who've been called to the Ordained Ministry or to be a Brother or Sister in a Religious Order.

Sometimes in such a way that it gives the impression that it's the pinnacle of perfection for a Catholic Christian to attain to.

The Church has always believed that being a Christian is our primary vocation, and the means to perfection in Jesus Christ.

Because: "By one sacrifice [on the Cross] he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." Heb. 10: 14

But, holding to that principle, doesn't in any way denigrate or diminish the importance of the call from the Lord to the Ordained Ministry or Religious life.

In fact, it places those vocations at the heart of the Church in the midst of her people.

Because those vocations are found and nurtured in ordinary Christian people loving God, and living in ordinary Parishes, just like ours.

Through each of us praying for, and encouraging such vocations in a sensitive, and loving way.

And love such as this is possible because: "It becomes so as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him - a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God's love to become in their turn a fountain from which 'flow rivers of living water' (See Jn. 7: 38)" Benedict XVI: Deus Caritas Est; Conclusion 42

And, because God is love, it means that He calls us to follow Him in love in so many different, and totally unexpected ways.

In the year 740 BC, Isaiah's quietly worshipping God in the Jerusalem Temple, and suddenly the Lord appears to Him in all His splendour and majesty.

And that encounter Isaiah has with the Lord God is rooted to a particular pivotal moment in history.

Uzziah, the King of Israel, who'd ruled powerfully and successfully for 52 years, was dead. What was going to happen to the country now? Would the next King be godly or corrupt? Would he make alliances with Israel's powerful neighbours Egypt, Syria, or Babylon that would make Israel a vassal to one of them?

And so God appears to Isaiah to show him that He, the Lord, is the true King.

A seraph touches Isaiah's lips with a hot coal, and his sin and guilt's taken away. Then the Lord calls...

"Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us? [And Isaiah says] Here I am. Send me." Is. 6: 8

Isaiah's vocation from the Lord God is to call Israel back to her Lord so that the people will: "See with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts and turn to [the Lord] for healing." Is. 6: 10

In the Gospel Peter, James, and John are fishermen and hard-nosed business men, but they've had a bad night, having caught nothing.

So they think they might as well listen to this man Jesus whilst washing their nets as they've got nothing better to do.

Jesus just casually asks Peter if He can use his boat as the people are crowding in on Him eager to listen to what He has to say.

Jesus, again casually, after He's finished speaking, says to Peter: "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Lk. 5: 4

Peter's the expert here so he knows full well that daytime isn't the best time to catch fish as they'll have gone to the bottom of the lake.

But he humours Jesus, casts out the nets, and in so doing hauls in so many that he has to call for help.

Then he falls at Jesus' feet and says: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" Lk. 5: 8
His reaction, like Isaiah's when he meets the Living God, is to recognise his sinfulness in front of utter holiness.

But God, in Christ, doesn't condemn Him. He calls him to a specific task: "Don't be afraid; [Jesus says] from now on you will fish for people." Lk. 5: 10

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran Pastor who was hanged by the Nazis in Buchenwald for resisting Hitler, said: "When Christ calls a person, he bids them to come and die. It is always a decision, either for or against Jesus Christ." Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Cost of Discipleship

This became a reality for Peter when he was martyred in Rome because of the decision he'd made to follow Jesus that morning all those years before at Lake Gennesaret.

This was also true for Paul, or Saul, as he was known when he was a zealous Jew and killing Christians such as Stephen, one of the first Deacons.

Stephen's witness, as he gave his life for Christ, must have made an indelible mark on Paul. In fact, it prepared Paul's heart for his encounter with the Risen Lord on the Damascus so that, in that instant, he was ready to accept Jesus as his Saviour.

Paul was called by Christ, and, as Bonhoeffer said: "It is always a decision, either for or against Jesus Christ."

Paul decided to follow Jesus Christ, and called many others to faith in Him as he indicates in the second reading:

"Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you." 1 Cor. 15: 1 - 2

On the outskirts of Rome, at Tre Fontane, Paul laid down his life for his Lord; just as Stephen and Peter had.

We may not be called to lay down our lives for Christ in that way, but if we're to truly follow Him then in another sense we are.

When we consciously make a decision for Jesus Christ, our old way of life has to die, which is just as painful as any other death.

Then we have to constantly invite the Spirit of Jesus to work in us so that we will: "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel." Ash Wednesday Liturgy

Most of us will live out our Christian vocation, Laity and Clergy, leading ordinary lives in the midst of the world; no doubt thinking that we've had little or no impact on anyone in particular, or the world in general.

But the quality of our loving, if it's rooted in Christ, and not a shallow misrepresentation of His love, will make an indelible mark in the heart of humanity.

Each one of us, at some point in our lives, has to say for ourselves that I: "*Have come to believe in God's love.* [Because] being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, [Jesus] which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." Benedict XVI: Deus Caritas Est; Introduction 1

God is love. This world was created out of His love.

And yet suffering and pain have invaded God's creation.

His love alone can conquer it; but we have to be channels and instruments of His love.

So let us take these words of a modern Christian song to our hearts as we seek to take up that vocation: "Love one another you said, come together as one. I'm just a servant, Lord, yet you made me a son. Sometimes I'm troubled by the things you make me see. But no matter how I feel, Lord, Here am I send me." Cliff Richard: There's No Power In Pity