

## Homily: Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C - February 9, 2025

*Readings: Isaiah 6:1–2a, 3–8 • Psalm 138:1–2, 2–3, 4–5, 7–8 • 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 or 15:3–8, 11 • Luke 5:1–11*

This Sunday's Gospel tells us — in St Luke's account — of the call of Jesus' first disciples and highlights Peter's humility and obedience to Jesus' command. The event takes place in the context of everyday life: there are several fishermen on the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret who, after working all night and catching nothing, are washing and arranging their nets. Jesus gets into one of the boats, that of Simon, called Peter, whom he asks to put out a little from the shore, and he starts to preach the Word of God to the crowd of people who had gathered. When he is finished speaking, he tells them to put out into the deep and cast the nets. Simon had previously met Jesus and felt the extraordinary power of his word.

Therefore, he responds: “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your command, I will let down the nets” (v. 5). And this faith of his did not disappoint; indeed, the nets filled with so many fish that they nearly broke (cf. v. 6).

Facing this extraordinary event, the fishermen are greatly astonished. Simon Peter throws himself at Jesus' feet, saying: “Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man,” (v. 8). That remarkable sign convinces him that Jesus is not only an amazing master whose word is true and powerful, but he is the Lord, he is the manifestation of God.

For Peter, this close presence brings about a strong sense of his own pettiness and unworthiness. From a human point of view, he thinks that there should be distance between the sinner and the Holy One. In truth, his very condition as a sinner requires that the Lord not distance Himself from him in the same way that a doctor cannot distance himself from those who are sick.

In the first reading of the prophet Isaiah, we find one of the most striking and illuminating biblical accounts of an encounter with God. We hear that Isaiah was in the temple when suddenly he “saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty: and the edge of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two, they covered their faces, and with two, they covered their feet, and with two, they flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’”

The cry of the seraphim, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” which we echo at every Mass, indicates this unique form of God’s difference. For biblical Israelites, “holy” means “set apart” or “absolute.”

Isaiah tells us that at the sound of the angels' singing, “the thresholds shook ... and the house was filled with smoke.” An experience of God constantly changes us; it never fails to shake the foundations on which we stand and rattle the walls that we

trust will protect us. The true God, when he breaks into our lives (if we let him), drives us out of our complacency, reconfigures us, and knocks us to the ground.

God wants us to acknowledge our sins (which we do as you might expect when we stand in his presence), but then he wants to cleanse us and ready us for mission.

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And so this story of Isaiah’s encounter with God that we heard in the first reading ends, appropriately enough, with his joyful response, “Here I am; send me!

In the second reading, the Apostle Paul reminds us that those who have become family through baptism and the Gospel they have heard preach to them, which they have received, that the Gospel is not mere catechetics or doctrine; it is the power to save. And it is even now saving the Corinthians if they remain committed to what they have learned from him. If they do not persevere in the same Gospel, they will have been converted in vain.

The Apostle bases the Gospel on the firm ground of the tradition, reaching back to Jesus’ life on earth. At the center of Christian teaching is Jesus’ death and resurrection. For this tradition, Paul borrows from an existing creed. The creed professes four elements: Christ died, he was buried, he was raised, and he appeared. The Old Testament Scriptures had promised one who would save us from our sins.

This is what Christ's death accomplished. At the same time, God's grace overcame Paul's sinful past as he wrote,

But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God (that is) with me. (1 Cor 15:10) Everything is grace, and every gift we have received from God is through his abundant grace.

In Luke's Gospel! Peter confesses that he is a sinful man, not unlike Isaiah, who, after seeing a vision of the Lord God, recognized that he was "a man of unclean lips." Depart from me, Simon tells Jesus, highly aware of his own unworthiness. However, it is precisely individuals who recognize their sinfulness that Jesus has come to call.

Peter's sin was overcome by Jesus, who called him, "Do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching men."

This Peter who spoke these words was once a fisherman and, in our day, a public speaker deserves high praise if he is able to converse with a fisherman! Addressing the first Christians, the apostle Paul says: Brothers and sisters, remember what you were when you were called. Not many of us were wise according to human standards; not many of us were influential or of noble birth.

But God, my brothers, and sisters, chose what the world regards as weak in order to disconcert the strong; God chose what the world regards as foolish in order to deflate the wise; God chose what the world regards as common and shameful, of no account whatever, in order to overthrow the existing order.

If Christ had first chosen a man skilled in public speaking, such a man might well have said: 'I have been chosen on account of my eloquence.' If he had chosen a senator, the senator might have said: 'I have been chosen because of my rank.' If his first choice had been a king, the king surely might have said: 'I have been chosen for the sake of power I have at my disposal.'

Let these worthies keep quiet and defer to others; let them hold their peace for a while. Saying they should be passed over or despised, I am simply asking all those who can find any grounds for pride in what they are to give way to others just a little.

Christ says, 'Give me this fisherman, this man without education or experience, this man to whom no senator would consent to speak, not even if he were buying fish. Yes, give me him; once I have taken possession of him, it will be obvious that it is I who am at work in him. Although I mean to include senators, orators, and kings

among my recruits, even when I have won over the senator, I shall still be surer of the fisherman.

The senator can always take pride in what he is, so can the orator and the king, but the fisherman can glory in nothing except Christ alone. Any of these other men may come and take lessons from me in the importance of humility for salvation, but let the fisherman come first. He is the best person to win over a king.’

Remember this fisherman, then, this holy, just, good, Christ-filled fisherman. In his nets cast throughout the world, he has the task of catching this nation as well as all the others.

To finish, today, let us ask the Holy Virgin Mary, our Mother, who, like no other, welcomed the Lord into the boat of her life to intercede for us. So we, like Peter, need to take courage to welcome Jesus into the boat of our hearts. “Do not be Afraid.” From now on, you will be catching men.”