

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
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Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
10 February 2019

Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8
Psalm 138
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
(Matthew 4:19) Luke 5:1-11

The Lord Makes Us Worthy

God has created each one of us to have “a unique, exclusive and unrepeatable relationship with [Him].”¹ Unique, exclusive, and unrepeatable, but there is also a *common pattern* we can recognize, in which God calls each of us into relationship with Him: God calls us; we sense our unworthiness; God makes us worthy; God equips us for and sends us on our mission.

We see that pattern revealed in the lives of the three holy people found in today’s readings: the Prophet Isaiah, and the Apostles Paul and Peter. Seeing how God worked in their lives, gives us the opportunity to learn how God is also working in our lives.

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In the first part of the pattern, we see that God is the One who always initiates. On our own, we have no access to God. He is the One who comes to us and in a Pure Gift reveals to us His Holiness.² Let’s take a look at how God revealed Himself to each of the three in today’s readings:

Isaiah: was granted a vision of God seated on His Throne in Heaven.³

His response: “Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips...”⁴

Paul: referred to Jesus’ appearance to him on the Road to Damascus, in which he was knocked from his horse with a flash of light.⁵

His response: “I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”⁶

Peter: saw the miraculous catch of fish.⁷

His response: "...he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.'"⁸

God revealed Himself and His Holiness to each of these three in a unique and personal way. For each one, the encounter with God immediately resulted in a feeling of unworthiness to be in God's Holy Presence.

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In the second part of the pattern, we see that God is, once again, the One who initiates and takes another step toward us. Even if we recoil or turn away when God reveals His Holiness to us, He persists and continues to pursue us. Let's look again at today's readings to see how this happened for each of the three:

Isaiah: God sent His Holy Angel to purify him from his sin.⁹

His response: "Here I am...send me!"¹⁰

Paul: God's Grace transformed him from a persecutor to an Apostle.¹¹

His response: "...the grace of God [is] with me...so we preach and so you believed."

Peter: Jesus spoke words of encouragement to him: "Do not be afraid..."¹²

His response: "[He] left everything and followed him."¹³

For each of these three, God's persistence included not only revealing His Holiness, but the additional step of healing, making worthy, and calling to mission.

It is the evil one who wants us to feel our unworthiness; to stay trapped in our sin and shame; and to keep us from fulfilling our mission to the world. Whenever God takes a step toward us, the evil one tries to push us into taking another step away from God.

But when we recognize God's Holy Presence in our lives, and then accept the grace of His healing, He makes us worthy and equips us to be sent forth on our mission, to fulfill that special purpose God has intended for each of us to do.¹⁴

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In the previous three weeks, I preached a series on three lessons from Saint Paul about spiritual gifts. The three lessons were:

- 1) Each of us has been given spiritual gifts by God for the benefit of the community.¹⁵
- 2) Each gift is necessary for the whole community to thrive.¹⁶
- 3) A gift is only valuable and useful to the community, when it's expressed with Love.¹⁷

I didn't intend to continue preaching about spiritual gifts for a fourth week, but this week's readings have (unexpectedly, for me) provided an opportunity for us to continue our reflection on what it means to be given spiritual gifts and a mission by God.

The three examples we have from today's readings – Isaiah, Paul, and Peter – had what seem like especially unique and amazing spiritual gifts and missions to fulfill. Preaching God's Word to hostile peoples; enduring persecution and death; being recorded and remembered in Sacred Scripture for all time. Of course, they must have been equipped by God in a very special way for such incredible missions, right? So, how do their especially unique and amazing missions relate to my own little mission?

Well, if we recall the lessons we've learned the previous three weeks about spiritual gifts, we remember that *each of us* has been gifted: we don't need to envy other people's gifts or manufacture our own gifts. And we remember that each gift is *necessary* and meant to be shared with and expressed with *Love* to the Body of Christ: when it's not shared and expressed with Love, then we all struggle or suffer in some way.

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Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote a beautiful reflection and prayer about the necessity for each person's spiritual gifts and mission to be shared with the world¹⁸:

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission – I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purposes, as necessary in my place as an Archangel in his – if, indeed, I fail, He can raise another, as He could make the stones children of Abraham. Yet I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connexion between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling.

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So, how do I place myself in God's Holy Presence? And receive His healing? And be made worthy and equipped to be sent on my mission?

There is no substitute for personal prayer in receiving our mission from God. That's something that can only be fully discerned in the secret of our own hearts. Making time and space to speak to God heart-to-heart is essential.¹⁹ We have a good starting point for fulfilling our mission by living out the holy vocation we are already in, and by faithfully performing the good works we have presented to us in our daily work and ministry in our workplace, home, neighborhood, or church.

And there is also no substitute for the Sacraments to assist us, support us, and strengthen us in living out our vocation, work, and ministry. The Sacraments are the clearest signs we have of God's Holy Presence still with us in this world.²⁰

In particular, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is the Sacrament in which the Lord speaks His Loving Mercy to each of us. The place where we – just like Isaiah, Paul, and Peter – are made clean, made worthy, and healed of sin or anything else that separates us or keeps us away from God or holds us back from fulfilling our mission.

And most especially, in the Mass and the Sacrament of Eucharist.²¹ This is why we come to church each week – or even every day, if possible – to be in the Holy Presence of God. How do we respond to being in God's Holy Presence?

- Listening intently to God’s Words of Salvation
- Praising God with our responses of prayers and songs
- Recognizing our unworthiness to be in His Holy Presence

We don’t recognize our unworthiness so that we feel bad about ourselves. That’s not humility. That’s the evil one trying to keep us separated from relationship with God. Humility, rather, begins with recognizing our constant relationship to God, acknowledging our unworthiness to be in His Holy Presence, and then – like the example of the three in today’s readings – recognizing that God *makes us worthy*.²²

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Today, just before receiving the Eucharist – the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ – we will pray together these familiar words:

Lord, I am not worthy
that You should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.²³

When we pray these words, we become part of the common pattern of relationship with God that includes Isaiah, Paul, Peter, and every other holy saint and disciple that has come before us or currently walks along beside us.

We are in the Holy Presence of God; we are made worthy; and we are equipped and sent forth on our mission, to accomplish some important purpose God has for us – that only we can do!

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Man’s Awareness of Being a Person*, General Audience of Wednesday, 24 October 1979.

² See *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 50-73, especially CCC 50: “Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and given himself to man.” And CCC 68: “By love, God has revealed himself and given himself to man. He has thus provided the definitive, superabundant answer to the questions that man asks himself about the meaning and purpose of his life.”

³ Isaiah 6:1: “I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne...”

⁴ Isaiah 6:5

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:8: “Last of all, as to one born abnormally, [Jesus] appeared to me.” Which is a reference to Acts 9:1-9. Also see: 1 Corinthians 9:1 and Galatians 1:16.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:9

⁷ Luke 5:6: “When they had [lowered their nets at Jesus’ command], they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing.”

⁸ Luke 5:8

⁹ Isaiah 6:7: “[One of the seraphim] touched my mouth with [an ember]. ‘See,’ he said, ‘now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sin purged.’”

¹⁰ Isaiah 6:8

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:10: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective.”

¹² Luke 5:10

¹³ Luke 5:11

¹⁴ See poem by George Herbert (1593-1633), *Love (III)*:

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.

You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

¹⁵ See 1 Corinthians 12:7: “To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.”

¹⁶ See 1 Corinthians 12:19-21: “If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I do not need you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I do not need you.’”

¹⁷ See 1 Corinthians 13:1-2: “If I...do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have [any gift]...but do not have love, I am nothing.”

¹⁸ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Meditations on Christian Doctrine – I. Hope in God—Creator*, 7 March 1848

¹⁹ *Cor ad cor loquitur*: Latin for “Heart speaks to heart,” the motto from John Henry Cardinal Newman’s Coat of Arms. Newman adopted this motto from a phrase used by Saint Francis de Sales in a letter in the 17th century.

²⁰ See CCC 1127: “Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies.”

Also see CCC 1509: “[The Church] believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, the physician of souls and bodies. This presence is particularly active through the sacraments, and in an altogether special way through the Eucharist, the bread that gives eternal life and that St. Paul suggests is connected with bodily health.”

²¹ See CCC 1088: “To accomplish so great a work” - the dispensation or communication of his work of salvation – “Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only in the person of his minister, ‘the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross,’ but especially in the Eucharistic species. By his power he is present in the sacraments so that when anybody baptizes, it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is present when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised ‘where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.’”

²² See Fr. Walter Ciszek, “Chapter 18: Humility” from *He Leadeth Me*, 175: Humility is the “constant realization of the relationship between each individual and God.”

Also see *Catholic Dictionary*:

“HUMILITY: The moral virtue that keeps a person from reaching beyond himself. It is the virtue that restrains the unruly desire for personal greatness and leads people to an orderly love of themselves based on a true appreciation of their position with respect to God and their neighbors. Religious humility recognizes one's total dependence on God; moral humility recognizes one's creaturely equality with others. Yet humility is not only opposed to pride; it is also opposed to immoderate self-abjection, which would fail to recognize God's gifts and use them according to his will.”

²³ Roman Missal, par. 132