

## Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Isaiah 6:1-2, 3-8

Ps 137

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Pope Francis has designated today as “Word of God” Sunday, and he has asked us to take this opportunity to grow in our love for Sacred Scripture, and to turn to it anew. As such, it’s worth noting that the Bible is not simply a collection of histories, or commandments, or letters. At its heart, the Bible is a love story, and the heart of this love story is an encounter with a Person. The heart of our faith is an encounter with the risen Lord. But in order for any encounter to have its full impact, we need to be ready to receive it.

First of all, we need to know who it is we’re encountering. When I was much younger, I was on a retreat with a well-known politician and had several in-depth conversations with them, but I had no idea who they were (maybe it was for the best!). Similarly, how many contemporaries of Jesus either met him or walked by him on the street and simply passed him by?

So we have to acknowledge who Jesus is, and we have to acknowledge our need for what he is offering us. So for instance, in each of our readings today we see someone open up to receiving the Lord’s mercy through an acknowledgement of their inadequacy.

In our first reading, the prophet Isaiah lamented that he was a “man of unclean lips”. In our second reading, Saint Paul acknowledged that he had “persecuted the Church of God”. And in our Gospel, Simon Peter confessed to Jesus: “I am a sinful man”. All three know their need of forgiveness, but all three are also aware of the power of God at work in them. *Despite* their sinfulness, all three were called by the Lord to be his chosen instruments. In a similar way, despite our *own* brokenness, the Lord has called each of *us* by name to our own respective vocations – callings that are built around deeply personal encounters with the Lord.

We can draw helpful lessons about this experience of conversion and calling from today’s readings. In each of the readings, we see how an authentic encounter with God first of all brought the person to recognise his poverty and limitations. Yet in spite of this weakness the Lord, rich in mercy and forgiveness, transforms the person and calls them to follow him. The humility shown by Isaiah, Peter and Paul invites all of us who have received the gift of Christian discipleship not to focus on our own limitations but rather to keep our gaze fixed on the Lord and on the freedom he offers, so that our hearts may be converted and that, like the Apostles in our Gospel, we may leave lesser things behind and joyfully follow him.

So let's look a little closer at the Gospel text in particular to tease this out a little further – and I just want to point out three things.

The first point is this – in our relationship with God, it is he who initiates the interaction. Jesus was standing by the lake, he saw two boats, and he got into Simon's.

This thought alone—that Jesus is the one who takes the initiative in our relationship—can sometimes seem a bit foreign to us. We perhaps can think that we are the ones putting in all the effort: we say our prayers, we come to Mass, we fulfil our various obligations. And if that's the way we see things, it's easy for us to think that our relationship with God is something that *we* do, and therefore even that it's something we earn or even deserve.

The truth is that we are called to be responsible partners in our relationship with God, but he is the one who always makes the first move. He is the one who knew you before you were born. He is the one who has been with you throughout your life, enticing you, inviting you to share in his life. He is the one who knows the where and the when and the why of it all, and has chosen *this* place, at *this* moment in time, for his own reasons, to get into your boat. How different might our relationship with God be, how different might our experience of Mass be, if we saw it all not as what we are doing, but what God is doing for us?

The second point – Jesus is in charge, and the fulfilment of our deepest longing is to be found in following him. Jesus asked Simon to push off from the shore and he did so. At Jesus' command Simon lowered the nets, and caught a great number of fish.

But don't forget, Simon was a seasoned fisherman. This was his boat, and his livelihood, so he could have been excused for saying, "I think I know what I'm doing here." However, in docility he heeded Jesus' commands – he humbly entrusted himself to a man he hardly knew. Like Simon, the Lord calls us, and has a plan that is for our deepest good – but for it to work, we need to hand over the reins to him.

The final point – we are not worthy of our calling, but Jesus chooses us anyway. Seeing the catch of fish, Simon Peter fell at the knees of Jesus and declared his sinfulness. I dare say all of us have felt like this from time to time? And yet—without hesitation—Jesus calls Simon beyond his fears, to a task and a life he could never have imagined.

We are all called into friendship with the Lord, and to share in his own divine life. When we see that God is calling us, that he loves us and wants to be with us, our unworthiness can smack us in the face. If we're honest, most of us would probably say that we're not entirely ready for God. The prospect of seeing God face-to-face, and living in complete intimacy with him seems overwhelming. And indeed it is! And yet, Jesus calls us, like he called Simon Peter, to entrust ourselves to him, and *to be in over our heads*.

Humbly acknowledging our need of God is a prerequisite to receiving the unmerited gift of grace he offers us. In doing so we let down our defences, and let him in – and crucially, we know that what we receive is a gift.

The heart of our faith is an encounter with the Lord, and we are preparing to encounter him anew at this Eucharist. Let us do so with a renewed desire to welcome him into our lives, and allow him to transform us into his living witnesses.