

Year C 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 6:1-2a, 3-8; Ps 138; 1 Cor 15:1-11; Lk 5:1-11

Clearly, this Sunday's theme is vocation, God's call to each of us. The first reading is the account of the call of the prophet Isaiah. He was not a priest, but is connected to the temple, and his book in the Bible has close affinities with priestly thought in the Kingdom of Judah. He saw the Lord seated on "an exalted and lifted up throne," with the skirts of his robe filling the temple. It was a tremendous experience of the Holy One of Israel, as Isaiah likes to call God. "Holy" means "separate," not ordinary or "profane," different from what is merely human or creaturely. Fiery seraphim proclaim God's holiness continually, and it seems that poor Isaiah shakes as much as the thresholds of the doors! He feels totally unworthy to have seen King Yahweh of the Heavenly Armies. Yet one of the seraphim cleans him and thus equips him for his mission. When God asks for a volunteer, Isaiah gets to raise his hand in the divine assembly and offers to be sent on behalf of the Lord.

The gospel reading is quite parallel, except that the call comes from God incarnate, Jesus who was born in a manger. Luke, unlike other evangelists, actually prepares the call of the disciples –Peter first– with a "miracle," a manifestation of Jesus' divine power. Peter feels the same as Isaiah: unworthy. Jesus tells him not to fear: from being a fisherman he will become a fisher of men.

Paul, too, considers his call abnormal, a surprise vocation, like an untimely birth (the Greek word used is also found in LXX Nm 12:12; Eccl 6:3; Jb 3:16 and can mean "abortive fetus"). God calls on us weak creatures to respond to his omnipotent might, for which nothing is impossible (in the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that her conception of Jesus is like her kinswoman Elizabeth conceiving in her old age, "for nothing will be impossible for God," Lk 1:36-37). What is necessary is humility. In Is 57:15, the expression "exalted and lifted up" is twice repeated to describe both God and his dwelling place (as in Is 6:1), only to add that God is also with the broken in spirit, in order to give them new life.