

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2019

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's call to serve him. They show that the circumstances surrounding any call are different from one individual to another, but they all refer to the same God. They invite us to recognize the ever presence of God who calls us to serve him and who sustains us in our mission.

The first reading describes the vocation of the prophet Isaiah. It starts with the vision that Isaiah had about the Holy and Almighty God. It contrasts the awareness of his sinfulness with the holiness of God and his adoration by the heavenly creatures. The reading finishes with the purification of Isaiah and his acceptance to serve God.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is holy and worthy of being glorified. There is also the idea that human beings are sinners and God alone can make them worthy of him. The last idea is related to the truth that, in spite of human sinfulness, God calls human beings to serve him.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus calls his first disciples. First of all, the Gospel starts by mentioning the teaching of Jesus to the crowd at the Lake of Gennesaret from a boat. After that, it talks about Jesus' invitation to Simon Peter and his friends to fish. Then, it gives Simon's reaction to Jesus' injunction by recalling how they worked so hard the whole night long without catching anything.

After that, it shows that when Simon and his friends obeyed Jesus and lowered their nets, they caught a great number of fish to the point that they not only needed help from their partners, but also their boat was in danger of sinking.

The Gospel finishes with Simon's recognition of his sinfulness, Jesus' calling that he becomes a fisher of men and the decision of his friends to leave everything in order to follow Jesus.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about God's call to serve him. Let me start with an evocation from the experience of life. In fact, the circumstances surrounding our lives are very different. Our backgrounds and the choices we have made in this life are also very different.

In spite of those differences, however, we have in common the fact that we have been called by the same God to fulfill various duties and roles in society, which determine the vocation in which we are today. According to our skills and abilities, some of us are farmers or social workers; others are specialized, and still others have no specific determination.

Human experience has shown also that we all have qualities as well as we all have limitations. However, the fact of having limitations does not mean that we are disqualified to work for God or to fulfill our duties in society. It means only that the awareness of our fragility should push us to rely more on God, who can make us better persons and capable of fulfilling his will, than on our strength.

That awareness of human fragility is what appears in the vocation of Isaiah. In fact, as he discovered the holiness and the grandeur of God, Isaiah judged himself unworthy of God. And God, who wanted that he work for him, purified him from all this wickedness and sinfulness. In that sense, God legitimated him so that, in spite of his personal

limitations, he might work for him. That awareness of human sinfulness was present in Simon Peter as he was overwhelmed by the miracle of the catching of fish.

In other words, it is God's will that we work for him, but it does not mean that we are perfect human beings. However, when we are obedient to God, he can change us so that we become truly his servants according to his will. Moreover, though called by the Lord, it does not mean that the work he gives us will always be easy. We have to toil and work hard before coming to a success. But, one thing is sure and we should never forget it, namely that we will never lack God's help and assistance in difficult moments.

That is why we should not be discouraged when we work so hard and the result does not follow. It is like the disciples; they worked so hard the whole night long, but caught nothing. When the morning came up and they were about to go home with their bitterness in heart, it is at that moment that Jesus intervened.

What the Gospel tells us is what we already know by experience, namely that those who give up because of the disaster of life, give up too soon. In the case of evident failure, we have to hope, even if it seems that there is nothing more to hope for. This can be for the case with the education of children or their abandonment of the Church; or their not practicing the faith initially received from family, etc.

Where we have failed, we have to start again and not drop our arms. Even when all the circumstances seem to be unfavorable, we still have a shot, at least one more shot. By starting again, we show that we keep our hope intact, because we believe in Jesus who can make the impossible become possible. If he has done it with his disciples, how cannot he do it for us? If we wait for a perfect set of circumstances, we will never begin at all. If we want a miracle, we must take Jesus at his word when he bids us to attempt the impossible.

As it appears, this Gospel invites us to hope, but it is not a hope based on an idealistic optimism that things will be better, but rather on the truth that God will never abandon us whatever might be our hardships. That is why we have to be convinced that, though life is difficult and surrounded by many hardships, we are not doomed to complete failure. God, who has given us life through our parents and has called us to serve him through our personal vocation, is also capable of sustaining us so that we come to a success.

That is why we not only have to trust him, but we have to be unafraid, because God can change our fate and give us joy again. Let us ask him to give us the courage to fulfill our vocation in this life in spite of all the difficulties we can meet. Let us pray that we have the courage to start again from where we have failed. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 6: 1-2a, 3-8; 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11; Luke 5: 1-11



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