

5th Sunday, yr. C, Xavier Church,
Isa. 6, 1-8; Ps. 138, 1-5.7-8; 1 Cor. 15, 1-11; Lk. 5, 1-11
Fr. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, have there ever been moments in your life when you experienced God very closely? I hope so for you and that you can cherish these moments.

Today, we hear St Paul proclaiming about a very intense experience of God that he had. Like us, Paul did never encounter Jesus as a human being. Yet, after Paul's conversion, he is proclaiming the Gospel. He writes that after His death, Jesus appeared to Cephas, this is Peter, and then to the twelve apostles. Then He appeared to more than five hundred people at once. How would they have reacted?

Years after the risen Lord has appeared to him, St. Paul recounts it with modesty, but also with confidence. He calls himself the least of the apostles and even one abnormally born. But he adds that he worked harder than all the others, not by own merit, but by God's grace that was with him.

The prophet Isaiah, from whom we heard in the first reading, had a very different experience of God. He did not know Christ, but in a vision he saw the Lord seated on a throne and surrounded by angels. He heard angels shouting: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts'.

Like St. Paul, he responds by acknowledging his own limitation. 'I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips.' This episode, known as the calling of Isaiah, must have taken place around 740 BC, we know this because of the mention of King Uzziah. What follows is a mystical experience of an angel touching his mouth with a glowing coal, thus forgiving his transgressions. This gesture is unique, but the forgiveness is universal. God comes to us, precisely in our weakness. He knows that we are limited people with limited possibilities. Yet Isaiah answers: 'Here I am, send me!' And he will go, like a great prophet who encourages his people.

Dear sisters and brothers, in our time Jesus is still calling us. As He spoke to Simon: 'Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men.' Simon Peter, when he saw the nets full of fish, replied, 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.' But the Lord does not go away from him. In the same way, Jesus still calls people to him. In my case, this happened at the time, now almost twenty-five years ago, by showing a clear path of priesthood and religious life. The circumstances of our time, which are sometimes difficult, do not play such a big role. When you feel that the Lord is calling you, the answer cannot be anything other than: 'Here I am, send me!'

In the context of the synodal process that the Church community is going through all over the world, this mission of each one of us, who are part of the body of the Church, is important. We can learn from each other; we need each other and when we listen to each other we can also help each other when problems arise.

The Lord calls people to married life and family life, or to life in the service of other people. We have a variety of gifts, and these come to fruition especially when we allow the Lord to do His work within us, when the grace of God is at work in us.

Then it is indeed as if Jesus comes to us in the flesh, as we also celebrate in the Eucharist, in the form of bread and wine.

We may hope that Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead. That is what we confess for centuries in our profession of faith. And His Kingdom will have no end. Amen.