

I Am a Mission, Send me, Lord!

5th Sunday of the Year – Cycle C – 10 February 2019

Readings: Is 6:1-8; 1 Cor 15:1-11; Lk 5:1-11

“Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?” I answered, “Here, am I, send me.” (Is)

Three Scriptural Signposts: One can see 3 calls and 3 com-missions in today’s three readings

[The three readings of today offer an excellent opportunity to focus on three calls of the three central characters in the readings: Isaiah, Peter and Paul. Common to these three calls is 3 A’s: (i) Awareness of one’s sinfulness and unworthiness, (b) Assurance of God’s power, holiness and faithfulness, and, (c) Aceptance of God-given mission]

1. Call of Prophet Isaiah: The first reading is a well-known passage from the Old Testament. Isaiah (approx. 742-700 B.C.) describes his vision of Yahweh in heaven with graphic imagery derived from the earthly temple of Jerusalem in which his experience takes place. This implies that the Jerusalem Temple is external expression of the eternal heavenly Temple. The *Sanctus* (Holy! Holy! Holy!) was, supposedly, part of the liturgy of the earthly temple, just as it is now used in Christian liturgy. Isaiah’s call is striking for he hears God seeking someone to speak in His name. Generous and ready though he is to volunteer, he is deeply aware of his utter unworthiness in the light of the overwhelming holiness of God. So, Isaiah confesses his sinfulness: “Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips” (v.5). Undeterred by Isaiah’s utterances of sinfulness and incompetence, God sends a seraph to touch his mouth with a live coal, declaring, “See now, this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out!” (v.7) Then, God asks, “Whom shall I send?” to which Isaiah generously responds: “Here am I, send me!” Prophet Isaiah will work as God’s mouthpiece for about 40 years trying to wean the people of Judah from their idolatry, selfishness and sinfulness, always reminding them of God’s love, mercy, holiness, fidelity and compassion. If one has used the previous week’s reflection: “*You are God’s microphone*” then one can stress that in Isaiah—like in the case of Jeremiah, last week—God chooses another ‘microphone’ to amplify God’s voice in human history.

2. Call of Peter, the Rock: In the Gospel of Mark, the call of Peter comes in the beginning as a bolt out of the blue. By contrast, Luke’s Gospel situates the call of Peter *later*, namely, *after* Peter has already witnessed Jesus healing his mother-in-law and *after* the miraculous catch of fish. Experienced fisherman that he was, Simon Peter certainly knew that it was senseless to cast his nets out in daylight after they had caught nothing all through the night. Nonetheless, he trusts in Jesus’ power and is astounded by the catch – so incredibly large that “their nets were beginning to break” (v.6) and their boats “began to sink” (v.7). Like Isaiah, Peter acknowledges his sinfulness in a most poignant plea: “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” (v.8). Jesus has now, literally ‘caught’ Peter, who is captive of all that he has seen, heard and experienced. Jesus says, “Do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching people.” The passage ends pithily: “When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.” Jesus ‘catches’ not just one big fisherman, Peter, but two others, too—James and John, sons of Zebedee—who will be three of his closest disciples among the ‘Twelve’.

3. **Call of Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles:** In the second reading Paul describes himself as “untimely born ... the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle” (v.9), stressing his own sinfulness and unworthiness. He makes a public *mea culpa*: “I persecuted the Church of God,” and yet, he also extols the role of grace in his ministry: “But, by the grace of God I am what I am” (v.10). Note that Paul’s witness gives testimony to the wonders that can be accomplished when divine favour (grace) marries human labour (ministry, in this case). In this passage too we see the dynamic of → awareness of sinfulness → assurance of God’s grace → acceptance to proclaim the basic gospel message: Christ died for our sins; Christ was buried; and now, Christ is the Risen Lord.

Three Texts from Catholic Tradition:

1. Vatican Council II’s *Lumen Gentium* n. 31, reminds us that everyone is called for mission: “The faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.”
2. Pope Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) n.15: “The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of love, and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love.
3. Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) n.273: “I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing.”

Three Current Concerns:

Awareness: Am I and Are We *aware* of all that is happening around us in church and society?

The idolatry, selfishness and sinfulness of Isaiah’s people are the same as those of me and you—products of our own times and places. Ask for the grace of seeing, hearing, touching and feeling the pulse of church and society: the signs of times and places, today.

Assurance: The mission is always a ‘*com*-mission’, namely, a mission ‘with’ God. This assurance of God’s power and presence is always consoling to the one sent on mission.

Acceptance: The call and mission are never stagnant but dynamic and require renewed response every day of our lives. God calls me and you, *today*. Will You/I be able to say anew: “Here I am, Lord, send me!”?

Reflection: There’s a popular Swahili saying, “To be called is to be sent,” which is also translated as: “We are called, we are sent.” This saying is used during the Easter Vigil Service in East Africa when the newly baptized are told that they are *called* by Christ and *sent* on mission. Here, we’re not specifically speaking about vocations to the priesthood or religious life, but about the universal Christic call shared by each and every baptized Christian. Let us remind ourselves and our people that it is *God* who calls and *God* who sends. Therefore, *God’s work* will surely reach final fulfillment in God’s way, God’s time. I must only pray: “Send me!” [End]