

# Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Year C



**FIRST READING**  
Isaiah 6:1–2, 3–8

**PSALM**  
Psalm 138:1–5, 7–8

**SECOND READING**  
I Corinthians 15:1–11 or  
I Corinthians 15:3–8, 11

**GOSPEL**  
Luke 5:1–11

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### PRAYER

#### Psalm 138:1–5, 7–8

I give you thanks, O LORD,  
with my whole heart;  
before the gods I sing your praise;  
I bow down toward your holy temple  
and give thanks to your name  
for your steadfast love  
and your faithfulness;  
for you have exalted your name  
and your word above everything.  
On the day I called, you answered me,  
you increased my strength of soul.  
All the kings of the earth  
shall praise you, O LORD,  
for they have heard  
the words of your mouth.  
They shall sing of the ways of the LORD,  
for great is the glory of the LORD.  
Though  
I walk in the midst of trouble,  
you preserve me  
against the wrath of my enemies;  
you stretch out your hand,  
and your right hand delivers me.  
The LORD will fulfill  
his purpose for me;  
your steadfast love, O LORD,  
endures forever.  
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

### READING THE WORD

#### First Reading Isaiah 6:1–2, 3–8

In the year that King Uzziah died,  
I saw the Lord sitting on a throne,  
high and lofty; and the hem of his  
robe filled the temple. Seraphs were  
in attendance above him; each had  
six wings: with two they covered  
their faces, and with two they covered  
their feet, and with two they  
flew.

And one called to another and said:  
“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”  
The pivots on the thresholds shook  
at the voices of those who called,  
and the house filled with smoke.  
And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost,  
for I am a man of unclean lips, and I  
live among a people of unclean lips;  
yet my eyes have seen the King, the  
Lord of hosts!”

Then one of the seraphs flew to me,  
holding a live coal that had been  
taken from the altar with a pair  
of tongs. The seraph touched my  
mouth with it and said: “Now that  
this has touched your lips, your  
guilt has departed and your sin is  
blotted out.” Then I heard the voice  
of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I  
send, and who will go for us?” And I  
said, “Here am I; send me!”

#### Second Reading 1 Corinthians 15:1–11

Now I would remind you, brothers  
and sisters, of the good news that  
I proclaimed to you, which you in  
turn received, in which also you  
stand, through which also you are  
being saved, if you hold firmly to  
the message that I proclaimed to  
you—unless you have come to believe  
in vain.

For I handed on to you as of first  
importance what I in turn had received:  
that Christ died for our sins  
in accordance with the scriptures,  
and that he was buried, and that he  
was raised on the third day in accordance  
with the scriptures, and that  
he appeared to Cephas, then to the  
twelve. Then he appeared to more  
than five hundred brothers and sisters  
at one time, most of whom are  
still alive, though some have died.  
Then he appeared to James, then

to all the apostles. Last of all, as to  
one untimely born, he appeared  
also to me. For I am the least of  
the apostles, unfit to be called an  
apostle, because I persecuted the  
church of God. But by the grace of  
God I am what I am, and his grace  
toward me has not been in vain. On  
the contrary, I worked harder than  
any of them—though it was not I,  
but the grace of God that is with me.  
Whether then it was I or they, so we  
proclaim and so you have come to  
believe.

#### Gospel Luke 5:1–11

Once while Jesus was standing beside  
the lake of Gennesaret, and the  
crowd was pressing in on him to  
hear the word of God, he saw two  
boats there at the shore of the lake;  
the fishermen had gone out of them  
and were washing their nets. He got  
into one of the boats, the one belonging  
to Simon, and asked him to put out  
a little way from the shore. Then he  
sat down and taught the crowds from  
the boat. When he had finished speaking,  
he said to Simon, “Put out into the  
deep water and let down your nets  
for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master,  
we have worked all night long but  
have caught nothing. Yet if you say so,  
I will let down the nets.” When they  
had done this, they caught so many  
fish that their nets were beginning to  
break. So they signaled their partners  
in the other boat to come and help  
them. And they came and filled both  
boats, so that they began to sink. But  
when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down  
at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from  
me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”  
For he and all who were with him

were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

## HEARING THE WORD

### "Liberation from Self-doubt"

Following a reflection on the prophetic vocation from last Sunday, today's readings examine the prophetic call from the perspective of the self-perception of those whom the Lord calls to be his heralds in the world.

In the first reading we find an account of the prophetic call of Isaiah presented in some detail. It occurred in the year of king Uzziah's death (probably 742 B.C.), in a vision occurring in the Jerusalem Temple. Isaiah sees God as the King seated on a high throne, with his magnificent robe filling the entire Temple. The throne is surrounded by angelic beings called "seraphs", which literally means "the fiery ones". They form a heavenly choir acclaiming God as the Holy One and the ruler of the heavenly host, who fills the whole of creation with his glory. This angelic proclamation causes the entire Temple to tremble and fill with smoke - another sign of God's presence - and immense grandeur (cf. Exod 19:9:18).

Not surprisingly, this vision overwhelms Isaiah. Faced with the God's magnificence and holiness, the future prophet trembles with fear thinking that he will

die. According to Israelite beliefs, there was a strict separation between the divine and human, holy and unholy, clean and unclean. Standing before the Holy God, Isaiah, an ordinary person, fears that he will be destroyed, just like a straw burns up when coming into contact with fire.

But Isaiah's destiny was to become God's messenger. Therefore, one of the seraphs cleanses Isaiah, touching him with a burning coal taken from the heavenly altar. This act cleanses Isaiah's human and unholy lips so that they can transmit the words of the Holy One. Cleansed, Isaiah feels ready to respond to God's call and enthusiastically declares, "here I am; send me!". These stages of Isaiah's call follow the classic pattern of prophetic calling. It begins with the experience of God, to which the one called responds with fear and a humble acknowledgment of sinfulness or unworthiness. In response God reassures and cleanses the called one of self-doubt and the sense of unworthiness. Restored to confidence and reassured, the prophet is finally ready to represent God before the world.

The second reading presents Paul's continuing struggle with the Corinthian community. This time, the problem rests in denial of the bodily resurrection by some of them. Being Greeks, the Corinthians grew up thinking that the body was weak and evil. They saw death as liberation of the soul from the prison of the fallen body. Thus, they hoped for eter-

nal life but not for the restoration of the body. Paul will expend much effort to convince them that resurrection involves a transformation of the human body. He begins by reminding them about the content of the "good news" he proclaimed to them, that is about Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. These three events constitute the "kerygma" - the very core of Christian faith and life. Then, Paul draws up a list of credible witness to the bodily resurrection of Jesus: Cephas (an Aramaic name for Peter), the twelve apostles, five hundred followers, and James. However, the statement where Paul refers to the risen Lord's appearance to himself (1 Cor 15:8-9) is most important for our theme and reflection today.

Paul had to overcome a profound personal obstacle that continually called his apostleship into question - his past. As he bluntly acknowledges, he was a violent and zealous persecutor of the Church, which meant that he persecuted Jesus himself (Acts 9:5). This was his "thorn in the flesh", that haunted him and led him into profound self-doubt. In today's passage Paul reveals how he dealt with this situation. First, he recalls his experience of the risen Jesus appearing to him much later than all others, which makes him "untimely born". Still, he was absolutely confident that this was the moment when he received his call to apostleship from the Risen Lord himself. Second, Paul states that he worked harder than all other apostles in the mission

field, cooperating fully with God's grace. Paul fought his self-doubt, and perhaps even guilt, by relying on the personal experience of Jesus and his utter and unwavering dedication to his mission.

Right at the beginning of his mission Jesus calls his first disciples. Luke narrates this event in much greater detail than Mark and Matthew, focusing his account on Peter, whose call resembles Isaiah's experience. Approaching Lake Gennesaret surrounded by large crowds, Jesus saw two fishing boats and the fisherman busy washing their nets after a night's work. Jesus chose the boat belonging to Simon as his teaching stage. When finished, Jesus asked Simon to put out and lower his freshly cleaned nets. Simon, an experienced fisherman, knew that this was not the right time to fish. Still, he had enough confidence and respect for Jesus to do as requested. Seeing the unexpected and very abundant catch of fish Peter fell to his knees, acknowledging his sinfulness, and asking Jesus to depart from him.

Calling himself "a sinner" Peter did not mean that he was a wicked and immoral person. He was an ordinary fisherman making a living working in an unpredictable and sometimes dangerous trade. This meant that he could not follow strictly the Jewish law with its numerous and very detailed demands, particularly in the area of ritual purity. He would be constantly dealing with strangers and other unclean people. He certainly did not keep the law to the degree that, for

example, the Pharisees did, which made him a sinner in their eyes. Recognizing that Jesus was a holy man from God and knowing his own situation fully well, Peter sees himself unworthy to be around Jesus. He was completely out of place, much like Isaiah in his vision.

Jesus reassured Peter, first telling him not to be afraid, and then giving him a new mission - "fishing for people". This simple fisherman who was unable to keep even his own religious laws, was entrusted with bringing people to faith in Jesus, and thus securing their salvation! Regardless of whether he understood the implications of his call at that moment, Peter confidently responded to Jesus. He overcame his self-doubt by an act of trust in Jesus, just as he first did when asked to put out his nets.

The example of Isaiah, Paul and Simon Peter reveals how liberation from the sense of self-doubt and unworthiness is the first step towards becoming a prophet or an apostle. Finding himself in the presence of the Holy God of Israel, Isaiah feared death because of his uncleanness. Paul was haunted by the memories of his violent past as a persecutor of Christians, and as an enemy of Jesus. Simon Peter did not live strictly by the law and would have never considered himself either worthy or capable of serving the Messiah as his apostle. This shows that God does not require perfection or sinlessness from his prospective servants. Instead, these three individuals teach that to serve God and Jesus, to be an apostle or a proph-

et, one needs a trusting and willing heart that overcome self-doubt, and makes one serve with utter commitment and dedication. Those who understand, despite their sense of unworthiness, can confidently state with the Psalmist, "the Lord will fulfil his purpose for me".

## **LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD**

The liturgy of today calls for a reflection on liberating ourselves from self-doubt and guilt. The starting point for this reflection is the appreciation of the gift of God's presence in us, and his concern for us. Our daily experiences of God's presence, surrounding us in one way or another, lead us back to look into ourselves. When we do so honestly, we see ourselves just as we are, and are able to recognize our capabilities and our limitations. In the first reading we noticed that when Isaiah experienced God's presence he came to terms with his limitations. Even though he was serving in the Temple, and theoretically had to be ritually "pure", he saw his unworthiness. But this recognition did not lead him away from God. On the contrary, he opened himself up to God's mercy, which allowed him to overcome his self-doubt.

For Paul, self-doubt was like a thorn in the flesh tormenting him daily. This thorn was likely to have been the memory of his past as a great persecutor of Jesus' followers. Without forgetting it, Paul learned how to come to terms with his difficult past. He did it by remembering the experience of the Risen

Lord, confident that it was the decisive moment of his call as an apostle of Christ. Furthermore, Paul made a conscious effort to focus on God's grace at work in his life. Thus, he fought his self-doubt by relying on his first experience of Christ, and on the continuing working of God's grace within him. The director of the movie "Black Panther", Ryan Coogler, in a recent interview recalled how he struggled with self-doubt in the process of making the movie. He mentioned that he would continually hear a voice of doubt deep within him saying, "this will never work". However, he kept pushing forward and never gave up, because he saw the hand of God behind his work. These examples show that confidence in doing God's work is instrumental in battling self-doubt.

Peter's experience of God's power working through Jesus made him tremble in the recognition of his sinfulness and unworthiness. Peter was not an immoral person. But looking realistically at his life he saw it as being far from ideal or even acceptable according to the demanding norms of his religion. Thus, he saw himself as a sinner, unworthy of even standing in Jesus' presence. But he conquered his self-doubt through acts of trust, as he responded to Jesus' commands.

Like Isaiah, Paul and Peter, we often sit back and wallow in guilt and self-doubt. Sometimes these feelings are legitimate because we have done wrong or failed. At other times, we are simply wallowing in self-pity.

Looking at these three biblical characters, we are assured that by letting ourselves be liberated from self-doubt we can really soar like eagles, and accomplish great things. We can all be true apostles of Christ in our society. Confidence in God, and active cooperation with his grace is the secret to success in life. No matter what our flaws, and the mistakes of the past, we are offered new chances every day. Self-doubt and the fear of failure block us from using our true potential. Here, we must remember that, "it is by trying often that the monkey learns how to jump from tree to tree." Thus, we are called today to refresh our trust in God, and combat self-doubt, by responding actively to God's grace.

## PROVERB

*"It is by trying often  
that the monkey  
learns how to jump  
from tree to tree."*

## ACTION

### Self-examination:

What are my greatest weaknesses? How do they hinder me from fulfilling my God-given potential?

Is my self-doubt preventing me from carrying out effective work? Do I use it as an excuse for not studying

or working effectively and consistently?

### Response to God:

My prayer this week will focus on my weaknesses and those events from the past that I regret. I will pray for forgiveness and for the grace of trust and confidence in God's forgiving and restoring presence.

### Response to your World:

In the course of this week I will reach out to those who are seen as "failures" and "outcasts" in my environment (addicts, LGBTQ persons, HIV/Aids patients etc). I will offer them some reassurance aimed at helping them to overcome self-doubt.

As a group during our prayer session we shall pray for the liberation from guilt and doubt of each of our members, and then discuss ways to help one another in overcoming these negative feelings and attitudes.

## PRAYER

*Almighty God  
we thank you  
for the gift of your word to us  
this day.*

*Grant that we may learn  
to ride over the obstacles  
of our self-doubt and guilt  
that diminish our confidence.*

*We pray also for those  
who have lost trust  
in themselves and in you.*

*Lord draw near to them,  
and draw them close to you.*

*We ask this  
through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*