

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah = ī-ZAY-uh

Uzziah = uh-Zī-uh

The spectacular language of this call narrative, including the anguished initial response from Isaiah, is so provocative that the words do all the work themselves. No need for dramatizing.

seraphim = SAYR-uh-fihm

Read these words slowly so that the assembly can hear them afresh.

Confronted with this vision of majesty and holiness, Isaiah confesses himself as wicked, both as an individual and as part of his community. Stress the words “man” and “people” here.

Now comes the call from God, and Isaiah responds with his full attention (“Here I am”) and readiness to act (“send me”). Emphasize this response, for God still calls us today.

READING I

Throughout salvation history, God has used various messengers to communicate his words to his people. But what qualifies an individual to take up such a role? While widely diverse in their qualifications, the messengers in today’s readings share a common quality: a humbling realization of their own sinfulness in the presence of true holiness.

The Book of Isaiah is filled with the prophetic utterances (Isaiah 1—39) of Isaiah of Jerusalem, whose prophetic call forms the heart of this first reading. Beginning his prophetic career around 742 bc

LECTIONARY #75

READING I Isaiah 6:1–2a, 3–8

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

In the year King Uzziah died,
I saw the **Lord** seated on a **high and lofty** throne,
with the train of his garment **filling the temple**.
Seraphim were stationed above.

They **cried** one to the other,
“**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!**
All the earth is filled with his glory!”
At the **sound** of that cry, the frame of the door **shook**
and the house was **filled** with smoke.

Then I said, “**Woe is me, I am doomed!**
For I am a man of **unclean** lips,
living among a **people of unclean** lips;
yet my eyes have seen the **King, the LORD of hosts!**”
Then one of the seraphim **flew** to me,
holding an **ember** that he had taken with tongs
from the **altar**.

He touched my **mouth** with it, and said,
“**See, now that this has touched your lips,**
your **wickedness is removed, your sin purged.**”

Then I heard the voice of the **Lord** saying,
“**Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?**”
“**Here I am,**” I said; “**send me!**”

—“the year King Uzziah died”—Isaiah prophesied for forty years. A central feature of Isaiah’s prophecies is his complementary description of the Lord as a regal figure who dominates in solemn majesty and as a parent who shows the enduring and comforting gentleness of a nursemaid.

It is the awe-inspiring majesty of the Lord that shapes Isaiah’s account of his vocational call. There are four scenes in this call. First is the overwhelming scene of the heavenly throne room, dominated by a lofty throne occupied by the fullness of the Lord, even as attendants (seraphim) hover

in flight and a divine choir sings of God’s complete otherness and proclaim God’s governance over the entire earth. It is amazing that only “the frame of the door shook”! In the second scene, when the novice prophet is confronted with such divine fullness and holiness, he becomes frightfully aware of his unclean state. He who had earlier castigated his fellow Jews, calling them a “[s]inful nation, people laden with wickedness,” (Isaiah 1:4), must now admit that he is one with them in their uncleanness. Even more, he is in mortal danger, for he, an unclean man, has seen

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 138:1–2, 2–3, 4–5, 7–8 (1c)

R. In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all
my heart,
for you have heard the words of my mouth;
in the presence of the angels I will sing
your praise;

I will worship at your holy temple
and give thanks to your name.

Because of your kindness and your truth;
for you have made great above all things
your name and your promise.

When I called, you answered me;
you built up strength within me.

All the kings of the earth shall give thanks to
you, O LORD,
when they hear the words of your mouth;
and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD:
“Great is the glory of the LORD.”

Your right hand saves me.
The LORD will complete what he has done
for me;
your kindness, O LORD, endures forever;
forsake not the work of your hands.

READING II 1 Corinthians 15:1–11

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

I am reminding you, [brothers and sisters,]
of the **gospel** I preached to you,
which you indeed **received** and in which you also **stand**.

Through it you are also being **saved**,
if you **hold fast to the word** I preached to you,
unless you believed in **vain**.

For [I handed on to you as of **first importance**
what I also **received**:
that **Christ died** for our **sins** in accordance
with the **Scriptures**;
that he was **buried**;
that he was **raised** on the third day
in accordance with the **Scriptures**;
that he **appeared** to Cephas, then to the Twelve.

After **that**, **Christ appeared** to more
than five hundred brothers at **once**,
most of whom are **still living**,
though some have fallen asleep.

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

In this didactic reading, Paul provides a
succinct, almost creedal, summary of
the faith.

Emphasize the key verbs here: “received,”
“stand,” “saved,” “hold fast.”

Cephas = SEE-fuhs

the great King, and it can only end in doom
and destruction. In the next scene, the Lord
clearly has a remedy for one who realizes
his unworthy state. One of the divinely
attending seraphim flies to Isaiah with a
burning ember and touches his mouth, thus
removing his wickedness and sin and quali-
fying him to stand in the divine presence
without being destroyed. The fourth and
final scene ends with the reminder that
God uses emissaries to accomplish his
work on earth. Isaiah, his wickedness hav-
ing been removed, offers to be sent.

READING II While Paul never had an
easy time with the Corin-
thian community, a talented but divided
community founded by Paul in the AD 40s,
few issues worried him as much as their
questioning of his Gospel. As he had done
earlier when dealing with previous divisive
issues, Paul again turned to a rhetorical
argument (15:1–58) to make his case.

While Paul’s lengthy list of all those to
whom the resurrected Christ appeared
may indicate that there were still some in
the Corinthian church who doubted Christ’s
resurrection, the larger rhetorical argument

treats not only Christ’s resurrection, but
also the resurrection of all who believe in
Christ. Still, today’s reading focuses on
forcefully promoting the central tenet of
Paul’s message: Christ’s resurrection from
the dead. He will address their doubts in
two ways.

First, Paul begins his argument by
asserting that the Good News he preached
to them is the source of their salvation if
they have held fast to it. He then proceeds
to define that Gospel more carefully. Using
the brief creedal formula that was wide-
spread in Paul’s other letters, Paul repeats

Accentuate the words "last" and "me."

This conclusion contains a perceptible level of tension because Paul seems to be effacing himself and promoting his hard work at the same time. Thus, the emphasis here would be on the phrase "grace of God that is with me."

Luke tells the story of how Jesus calls Simon, James, and John. As always, avoid dramatic portrayals, but do consider highlighting features of this story that might otherwise be overlooked.

Gennesaret = geh-NES-uh-reht

A first remarkable detail is that Simon, exhausted from a night's fruitless labor, honors Jesus' request.

that Christ died, was buried, and was raised. Furthermore, Paul includes two essential qualifiers: "Christ died for our sins," and all of this occurs "in accordance with the Scriptures." By using a familiar creedal formula, Paul reinforces the message that this is a fundamental and necessary element of the Gospel and of the people's faith in Jesus as Lord. To omit any element from this formula would make them unable to acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

Second, Paul addresses their doubts in the resurrection with a lengthy list of witnesses to the risen Lord. He does this for

After **that** he appeared to James,
then to **all** the **apostles**.

Last of all, as to one born **abnormally**,
he appeared to **me**.]

For I am the **least** of the apostles,
not fit 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** to me has not been ineffective.

Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them,
not I, however, but the **grace of God** that is **with** me.

[Therefore, whether it be I or **they**,
so we **preach** and so you **believed**.]

[Shorter: 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, 11 (see brackets)]

GOSPEL Luke 5:1–11

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

While the crowd was **pressing** in on Jesus and **listening**
to the word of **God**,

he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret.

He saw two boats there alongside the lake;

the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets.

Getting into **one** of the boats, the one belonging to **Simon**,

he asked him to put out a **short** distance from the shore.

Then he **sat down** and **taught the crowds** from the boat.

After he had finished **speaking**, he said to Simon,

"Put out into **deep** water and **lower your nets** for a catch."

Simon said in reply,

"Master, we have worked hard all **night** and have

caught **nothing**,

but at your **command** I **will** lower the nets." »

two reasons. On the one hand, such a lengthy list is difficult to refute, especially when all those who have seen the Lord proclaim the same creedal statement as Paul. On the other hand, Paul is mindful that some in the community question his authority. Thus, by placing himself among this cloud of witnesses, albeit as the least worthy of them, Paul's message gains legitimacy. He further strengthens that legitimacy by noting how hard he has worked, in spite of having been "born abnormally." After all, it is by God's call and God's grace

that he is their apostle, and God's grace has not been without effect.

GOSPEL Among the unique features of Luke's Gospel is the fact that, in comparison with the other three evangelists, he delays Jesus' call to his first disciples. Luke, it seems, wants Jesus and his reputation to be well established before he calls his first followers.

It is this delay and Jesus' popularity that explain the large crowd that presses in on him and precipitates his encounter with Peter and his fishing partners, James and

Peter's words echo those of Isaiah from our first reading. Confronted with Jesus' power, Peter names his own shortcomings. Linger over the words that show people's fear and astonishment.

Jesus does not condemn. Your tone here should illuminate Jesus' reassurance.

Pause after the familiar-but-stunning phrase "they left everything" to let the idea sink in.

When they had **done** this, they caught a **great number** of fish and their **nets** were **tearing**.

They signaled to their partners in the **other** boat to come to **help** them.

They came and **filled both** boats so that the boats were in danger of **sinking**.

When Simon Peter saw **this**, he **fell** at the **knees** of **Jesus** and said,

"Depart from me, Lord, for I am a **sinful** man."

For **astonishment** at the catch of fish they had made **seized** him and all those **with** him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were **partners** of Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, **"Do not be afraid;** from **now on** you will be catching **men**."

When they brought their boats to the shore, they **left everything** and **followed** him.

John. Although Mark and Matthew have a similar dialogue, there is no miraculous haul of fish, and the most similar scene is found only at the end of John's Gospel and in a completely different context (John 21:1–11). In Luke, Jesus has already demonstrated his power through his deeds, but now he employs that power to win over Peter (and eventually James and John as well). Thus, Peter and the others are to follow, not due to a naked command with no context, but rather due to Jesus winning over their imaginations and hearts through a miracle that exceeds all expectations.

Peter's initial objection, as well as his acquiescence, identify him as the spokesperson for the rest, and this establishes a pattern that will prevail throughout the Gospel.

Strikingly, in the face of the miracle, Peter's encounter with the divine makes him deeply aware of himself as a sinner, not unlike Isaiah in the first reading. And yet it is Peter's humble honesty in the presence of holiness that leads Jesus to banish his fear and to entrust him with a new version of his old vocation: from now on, he will be "netting people" (*anthrōpous esē*

zōgrōn in Greek). Ironically, he who asks Jesus to depart from him ends up leaving everything behind and following him, in spite of his sinfulness. S.L.