

By God's Grace I Am Who I Am  
February 6, 2022, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Gospel of Luke 5:1-11  
Fr. Brad

In all three episodes in today's readings, first Isaiah, then Paul, and in the Gospel Peter, the experience of the presence of God brings each to an extreme awareness of their own sinfulness, inadequacies - - their unworthiness.

They are made aware of their true place in reality - - not that they are worthless and being shamed by God, but that they are thoroughly helpless and inadequate before God. Each of them is forced to look at themselves and compare himself directly with the presence of God.

They can no longer kid themselves with the illusion that they are in control and are living independently holy and virtuous lives. Any illusion of grandeur or sense of their own self-importance and independence is gone with the wind once they experience the presence of God. Here there is no more room for pride and ego, only complete surrender.

We must admit we often kid ourselves into living in the illusion that we have a control that we do not really have. Each of us is capable of creating a false narrative of ourselves and of others. And each one of us struggles at some level with jealousy, selfishness, and a pettiness of heart and mind that are not far below the surface. It is a sober awakening to come to realize that it is only God who can make us holy.

The experience of God is ultimately intended to lead us to joy and new hope. But it must be preceded by humility and recognition of our unworthy and ill equipped selves.

To top it off, we can do our best and still fail. We can work our butts off and discover we have nothing to show for our efforts. That in itself is discouraging. It's hard when ones best is not good enough. The person who draws strength from failure is rare.

In the Gospel, Jesus encouraged these fishermen to try again...to put out into the deep again right after they spent an entire night out fishing and catching nothing. Nevertheless, they acquiesce to Jesus' request and we see the result. What is the lesson here? Perhaps one is to never give up. Secondly we can note that we all need someone to believe in us, to encourage us. We do well to acknowledge that failure is not in the falling down but in the staying down.

Isaiah was in a very lost place after the death of his King Uzziah but would go on to become the foremost prophet of Israel. His prophecies of the Messiah give the world hope even today.

To this point, Eleanor Stump says, *'If you can stand under your own sorrow, rather than fall apart, then through the searing grief can come new life, a good life that was unimaginable to you before. If you can stand and live into the period of your life after the destruction of your heart's desire, then God's grace can bring life out of death for you.'*(Eleanor Stump)

Emerson said **each one of us has a greater possibility within us**....a closet or chamber that has never been opened. If we are to realize this greater possibility **we must go beyond ourselves**, beyond what we think we are capable of. And we all need someone to say to us **'launch out into the deep.'**

Upon the great catch of fish, **Peter was faced with his own inadequacies, his sinfulness but Jesus knew he was capable of greatness.**

In the reading from Isaiah, God is addressing us as well as the prophet when He says, *'Whom shall I send; who will go for us?'*

That same invitation is reiterated when Jesus says to the fishermen, *'Put out into the deep for a catch. Follow me and I will make you fishers of people.'*

Each one of us is called to some special work that we are best suited to accomplish for the building up of His Kingdom in this world. Isaiah, Paul and Peter had to experience their own inadequacies and sinfulness head on. In order for us to say yes to the invitation, we must face our own inadequacies and sinfulness head on. It is then that we have the opportunity to say yes to the invitation and be put to work by God. Then we can, like Paul, say, *'By the grace of God I am what I am'*. Never underestimate the grace of God.

We have nothing to fear concerning our own inadequacies. We simply need to say yes to that invitation and allow God's grace to work through us. The more we understand that, the more we can let go of the frivolous things of life in order to follow Jesus.

The world needs people who would not merely catch fish but would catch people in the unconditional love of God. And each one of us is invited to participate, regardless of the stage of life we are in.

Remember, we are sinners but **we are loved sinners**. Both goodness and sin constitute our identity. It is in our faith and trust in God's guidance and empowering grace that we become able to navigate toward our full potential as His disciples. Through the Eucharist, may the grace of the 'live coal' spoken of by Isaiah touch our lips, our hearts, and minds. Amen