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5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Date: Sunday, February 10, 2019 | **Season:** Ordinary Time before Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Isaiah 6:1–2a, 3–8
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 138:1–5, 7–8 | **Response:** Psalm 138:1c
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 or 15, 11
Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 4:19
Gospel Reading: Luke 5:1–11
Preached at: the Carmelite Monastery of Sr Thérèse in Benoni **in the** Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa**.**

Our readings this morning all talk about an encounter with God that carried with it an invitation or a call to spread God's word, to accept God's grace, and to do God's will.

I'm sure we all recognised these calls. They all broadly follow a similar pattern. There is usually some crisis, God commissions a person or asks them to do something. That person usually tries to object and find reasons not to say yes, e.g. "I'm not worthy", but then God gives an assurance, usually "I am with you", and might even offer a sign – perhaps some forgiveness, or an offer of grace that brings courage or faith. But ultimately, there is a choice that must be made. In our readings we heard about people who chose God. In our lives today, can we also choose God?

In the first reading Isaiah is called. When he senses he's in the Lord's presence he immediately becomes aware that he is "a man of unclean lips", unworthy to utter God's word. But God does not condemn him, but rather calls him and cleanses his lips and he is sent to speak God's word, and Isaiah becomes one of the greatest prophets.

In the second reading, Paul tells us how the risen Jesus appeared to many individuals who were all important in the foundation of the Church. And he explains how he sees himself among the original group of apostles. When he remembers his experience of being called by the risen Lord he also says how unfit he was to be called an apostle. But because of the grace of God he was made a minister of the Gospel – and we know Paul took the Gospel to the Gentiles and we are very much the community we are today because of his acceptance of God's call.

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Finally, Simon Peter in the Gospel, recognising the word of God in the work of Jesus, falls to his knees and prays, like Isaiah, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man". In answer, Jesus makes him a fisher of men, and later declares that upon this rock he will build his Church.

So these are all examples of God calling, and then sending – with amazing results. God does not always call the most obvious person. Most times, in fact, it's the most unlikely person. It may be that it is precisely because of our perceived weaknesses that we are called. Just think of the types of people God called in the scriptures. David was the youngest child, Deborah was a woman, Abraham was a wandering Aramean, Jacob was a liar, Gideon was a coward, Isaiah felt unclean, Peter was a simple fisherman, Paul persecuted Christians, and Mary was a teenage girl from a remote country village. None of these might have featured on any 'short-list' by today's standards – but they all answered God's call. And let's just contemplate the result. Like the massive catch of fish we heard about in the Gospel that seemed all but impossible – if we trust God and answer his call, we need not fear. Can we allow ourselves today to be surprised by God?

I invite you to think now when was the last time you encountered God. Was there something God was calling you to? How did you respond? If you objected – did you allow yourself to listen to what God's response was? Could you allow yourself to believe it?

There's a phrase that we seem to hear more often in our country today. It's "Thuma mina." "Send me." It seems in South Africa that we are in a new era where we are more willing to accept challenges, and to hope again. But perhaps as we hear others or ourselves say this, we are also feeling unworthy, unable, or unwilling like Isaiah, or Peter did. We might not be called to do huge things – but we can all make a difference and choose to live more like Christ in our own ways, and introduce some positive change where we are and with those we are with.

Let's pray today that we might be given the grace – as Paul was – and that we might accept and embrace that grace, and so say to God too, "Yes! Here I am. Thuma mina! Send me!"

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