

### **One-page synopsis of O.T. V [C] Homily on Luke 5:1-11 (Feb 7)**

**Introduction:** The central theme of today's readings is God's call to a person, and the positive response to this call which leads the person to discipleship. God's call described in today's scripture has three steps: 1) the revelation of God Himself, or of Jesus' identity as the One sent from God; 2) the recognition and confession of one's unworthiness and inadequacy to receive this call; and 3) the word of reassurance from God, or Jesus, and a call to share in his life-giving mission. Today's readings also teach us that God has His own criteria for selecting people to be prophets and ministers. Presenting the special calls, or vocations, of Isaiah, Paul and Peter as life-changing events, the readings challenge us to examine our own personal calls to conversion and discipleship.

**Scripture lessons:** Isaiah in the first reading and Peter in today's Gospel express their unworthiness to be in the presence of God's great holiness, and Peter and Isaiah both immediately receive their Divine calls. Today's second reading describes the call of another great apostle, Paul, who judges himself to be unworthy of the name or the call as he was a former persecutor of the Christians. It was by giving these three men a strong conviction of their unworthiness and of their need for total dependence on His grace that God prepared them for their missions. The Second Vatican Council teaches that we are *all* called to ministry by virtue of our Baptism into Jesus Christ.

**Life Messages:** 1) We need to pray that our encounters with the holiness of God may lead us to recognize our sinfulness. God, who calls us and commissions us for His service, wants us to realize His presence everywhere and in everyone, to repent of our sins and to remain in readiness to speak and act for Him in our life circumstances as He shall direct.

2) We need to teach and practice expressions of reverence for the Lord. We need to express our reverence for God through appropriate bodily gestures. For example, when we come into Church we need to show reverence for Jesus' presence in the tabernacle by making a deep bow or by genuflecting and blessing ourselves with sign of the cross. Then we need to honor Him by listening to the word of God and by actively participating in the liturgy's prayers and singing. This same sense of reverence can be expressed by keeping the Bible, God's living word to us, in a prominent place in our homes and by kissing it each time we read from it. True reverence for God naturally leads us to the reverent, respectful love of our neighbors as God dwells in them. 3) Each of us has a unique mission in the Church. This is why God has a different call for each of us. Each of us is unique, so each of us has a mission which no one else can fulfill. Let us accomplish this mission by radiating the love, mercy and forgiveness of Jesus and by participating in the various ministries of our parish.

**OT V (Feb 7, 2016): Is 6:1-2a, 3-8; I Cor 15:1-11; Lk 5:1-11(L/16)**

**Anecdote 1:** "Ours is total commitment!" There was a story about the hen and the pig bragging to each other about their contribution and commitment to humanity. The hen

brags: "We hens supply thousands of eggs for the market every day. Ours is the best." Not satisfied, the pig countered, "And who lay down their lives so that people may eat bacon, *lechon*, barbecue, ham and sausages? Pigs. Ours is total commitment!" In all the readings for today, especially the Gospel, the message is one – a Call from God and the Commitment expected from those God has called.

**# 2: A call rejected:** Reverend Billy Graham tells of a time early in his ministry when he arrived in a small town to preach a sermon. Wanting to mail a letter, he asked a young boy where the post office was. When the boy had told him, Dr. Graham thanked him and said, "If you'll come to the Baptist church this evening, you can hear me telling everyone how to get to Heaven." "I don't think I'll be there," the boy said. "Why?" Billy Graham asked him. "Because you don't even know your way to the post office! How can you show me the way to Heaven?" Today's readings tell us about the calls of the prophet Isaiah, Paul, and Peter to God's ministry.

**# 3: Call answered as a continuous process:** There is a story about a sophomore who worked in the library at Princeton, New Jersey to earn money to help with his education. One night about closing time, he was walking around the empty halls of the library when he noticed in the very back corner amid an old stack of books, an old man reading and taking notes furiously. The old man was very intent. The librarian became a little curious so he went back to the old man and said, "My, what are you studying so intently?" The old man looked up long enough to say, "Well, I'm a student of physics." The young librarian said, "Well, last year I took a course in physics and I think I have all I need for an understanding of physics." He then turned and walked back to his desk. You can imagine his chagrin a few minutes later when the old man checked out some books, and on his library card was the name Albert Einstein. God's call is a calling to a process, not to a single task. Today's Scripture readings about the calls of Isaiah, Peter and Paul remind us that our calling is to a lifelong process of obedience, service and surrender to God in which we grow daily more like Jesus. There is nothing in the world more joyful than that. There is nothing in the world more challenging.

**# 4: Divine call daily executed:** One day, author and educator Howard Hendricks was on a plane that was delayed from takeoff. As passengers became irritated and demanding, Howard noticed how gracious one of the flight attendants continued to be with each passenger. When they were finally in the air he continued to be amazed at her poise and control. When she came by his seat, Howard asked if he could write a letter of commendation to the airline on her behalf. "I don't work for the airline," she replied, "I work for Jesus Christ. My husband and I prayed this morning that I would be a good representative of Jesus Christ on this flight." Do you have a career or a calling? You see, somewhere out on Lake Galilee, a handful of fishermen were transformed in such a way that they would eventually change the world because Christ had come and had given them a mission for eternity.

**Introduction:** The central theme of today's readings is God's call and people's response. Today's readings teach us that Christian spirituality is discipleship, which means a positive response to God's call. Discipleship has three steps: 1) The revelation: The miraculous, catch of fish described in today's Gospel was a revelation of Jesus' identity as the One sent from God. 2) The recognition and confession of one's unworthiness and inadequacy: "*Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.*" 3) The word of reassurance from Jesus and a call to share in his life-giving mission. Today's readings are "epiphany-call stories" which tell us that God has His own criteria for selecting people to be prophets and ministers. Presenting the special calls, or vocations, of Isaiah, Paul and Peter as life-changing events, the readings challenge us to examine our own personal calls to conversion and discipleship. When faced with the awesome power of God, Isaiah, Paul, and Peter are all struck dumb by a sense of their own unworthiness. Peter in today's Gospel and Isaiah in the first reading express their unworthiness to be in the presence of God's great holiness, and Peter and Isaiah both immediately receive their Divine calls. Today's second reading describes the call of another great apostle, Paul, who judges himself to be unworthy of the name or the call as he was a former persecutor of the Christians. It was by giving these three men a strong conviction of their unworthiness and of their need for total dependence on His grace that God prepared them for their missions. The calls of these various ministers of God are set before us so that we can reassess our own call from God and our response to Him. The Second Vatican Council teaches that we are *all* called to ministry by virtue of our Baptism into Jesus Christ.

First reading, Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8: In the late eighth century BC, God's people in the Promised Land had become divided into a northern kingdom, Israel, and a southern kingdom, Judah. Among outside hostile forces, Assyria was the dominant power in the region. A fourth nation, Syria, was also vying for power, and trying to recruit Israel to support its ambitions. The kings of Israel and Judah started cooperating in political schemes to insure their nations' safety, instead of relying faithfully on the Lord God to sustain them. This was the situation in which Isaiah received God's mission to speak God's word to the kings and people of Judah and Israel. Yahweh permitted Isaiah to experience His magnificence in a vision in the Temple of Jerusalem. Experiencing the glory of God, Isaiah at once confessed his unworthiness, calling out, "*Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips.*" In the presence of God's holiness, Isaiah became painfully aware of his own sinful human nature. However, when cleansed by God, he was ready for His ministry: "*Here I am. Send me!*" God gave him the courage to speak His word, interpret His will, and call His people and their leaders to repent and return to God's ways.

**Second Reading, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**: Some Corinthian Christians questioned Paul's authority and disputed the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Paul silenced them by presenting the evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus. Then he recounted the story of how he had been chosen to be an apostle to the Gentiles. But Paul confessed his unworthiness to be an apostle because of his former persecution of Christians and gave the full credit to God

for his call to the ministry: "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*" That is, it was only by the grace of God that Paul was claiming the designation of "apostle" and only by that authority that he proclaimed the Gospel, toiling harder than the other apostles. He reminded the Corinthians that he had already passed on to them the traditional confession of faith about Jesus' death and Resurrection, which he had received personally from Christ Himself. Hence, the Corinthians should not doubt his teaching about the resurrection, lest they forfeit salvation and wind up having believed in vain. A real Faith not only accepts the content of God's message but involves a total surrender of one's self and all one has into God's hands. Our response to God's grace must be like that of Paul.

**Exegesis: Epiphany on the sea:** The story of the miraculous catch of fish described in today's Gospel is similar to the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus recounted in John 21: 4-14. In both accounts, the apostles at first fail to recognize who Jesus is, then receive a revelation of his true identity. This prompts a full confession of Faith from Simon Peter to which Jesus responds by commissioning him as the representative of the disciples. In this sense, both narratives are Epiphanies in which Jesus reveals himself to the world as the Messiah—for he does what only God can do. The point of this story lies, not in the miraculous catch, but in the confession of Peter and his commissioning by Jesus.

**The fishermen and fishing:** The scene is the Sea of Galilee (*Gennesaret* in Greek and *Tiberias* in Latin). This body of water is thirteen miles long and seven and a half miles wide. In Jesus' time, there were ten prosperous towns situated around the lake. Most of the people residing in them made their living from the waters in front of them. Thus, one gets the idea of how rich the lake was in fish. The Sea of Galilee was the site of many manifestations of Jesus' Divine power. In the incident in today's Gospel, Jesus preached from Peter's boat to a large crowd jammed together at the edge of the water. When the teaching had ended, Jesus told Peter to pull out into deeper water for a catch of fish. In matters of fishing, Peter was an expert, while Jesus was only a carpenter. Hence Peter, perhaps not wanting Jesus to look foolish, explained, "Master, we have worked hard all night long, caught nothing." Peter might have added that fish come to the surface in the Sea of Galilee only at night, or that the presence and noise of people would frighten the remaining fish away. Instead he said, "*Nevertheless, if You wish it, I will lower the nets.*"

**Hope against hope:** That declaration of trust was what made the miracle that followed possible. We may assume that Jesus smiled a little, indicating that he understood Peter's point and still wanted the fisherman to take the boat out into deeper water. So Peter obeyed. This time, however, instead of pulling up an empty net, Peter and Andrew found the net was filled to bursting point, and they had to ask the help of their partners, Zebedee's sons James and John, to help them bring in the catch. Simon Peter understood the message very quickly. Confronted by the size of the catch, he recognized the presence of God before him and became convinced of his own pride and self-centeredness, that is, of his sinfulness. We find the same response in all three readings today. Isaiah, seeing the glory of God in his vision, says, "*What a wretched state I am in! I am lost, for I am a man*

*of unclean lips... and my eyes have looked at the King, the Lord of hosts."* Paul, not particularly known for his modesty, says, *"I am the least of the apostles... I hardly deserve the name apostle."* Peter begs Jesus to go away. His simple confession --*"Leave me Lord. I am a sinful man."*-- marks a turning point in his life, and becomes the model for our response to Jesus. Jesus seized the opportunity to proclaim Peter's mission, a call Peter was able to receive because he had seen the tremendous power of God. Thus Peter became the first person in the Gospel to acknowledge his sinfulness. He is also the first apostle to be called by Jesus. Today's Gospel concludes with an inspiring image of commitment: *"When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him"* (Lk 5:11).

**The abundance miracle:** The miraculous catch of fish is a miracle of abundance and resembles other "abundance" miracles such as the sending of manna to Israel in the wilderness (Ex 16), the widow's never-empty meal jar and oil jug (1 Kgs 17:8-16), the necessary supply of oil for the lamps for the rededication ceremony of the Temple (2 Kgs 4:1-7), and Elisha's feeding of a hundred men with twenty loaves of bread (2 Kgs 4:42-44). Later in this same Gospel, we will see Jesus feeding five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish (9:12-17). The Gospel of John reports another abundance miracle, the wine Jesus supplied at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). All these "abundance" miracles have two common characteristics: (1) they meet human needs and (2) they demonstrate God's power. The spiritual outcome of this particular miracle was that the disciples, *"left everything and followed [Jesus]"* (v. 11).

**Dimensions of discipleship:** The Gospel reading today displays the three dimensions of discipleship: (1) the *recognition* of the power of Jesus, (2) the *response* of confession, and (3) the *assurance* of success when we follow God's word. Peter's commission is one which is repeated often in the New Testament (Lk 9: 20, 22:32; Jn 21: 1ff; Mt 16: 16ff). Peter and the other disciples were given the privilege of sharing in Christ's work of gathering people to God. As they shared in gathering the fish, so now they would share in gathering "lost" human beings. Simon's response was similar to the responses made in other Old Testament human encounters with God. As he stood before the burning bush, **Moses** confessed his disqualifications for leadership, particularly his inability to speak well. (Ex 3:11-4:17, esp. 4:10). Later in the Bible, when God came to **Solomon** in a dream, Solomon declared that he was not wise enough to govern God's people and asked for an "understanding heart" (1 Kgs 3:7-9). Likewise, when God called **Jeremiah**, the prophet recognized the inadequacy of his youth to take on this mission (Jer 1:6).

**Who are called as the fishers of men?** It is not true that Christ's invitation to become "fishers of men" is addressed only to the apostles and their successors (the bishops together with the priests and religious). Every Christian is commissioned to a ministry of love and justice by virtue of his/her Baptism. *Lumen Gentium* - one of the documents of Vatican II, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in paragraph no. 31 describes all of us very clearly as, "the faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ's Body and are

placed in the people of God and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world." In addition to this, Vatican II's *Apostolicam Actuositatem* no. 3 says, "Incorporated into Christ's Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, the laity are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself." It is even stated that where lay involvement is lacking, "the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect; where lay responsibility is absent the Church is incomplete," (*Apostolicam Actousitatem* nos. 10, 21, PCP II).

**Life Messages:** 1) We need to pray that our encounters with the holiness of God may lead us to recognize our sinfulness. The Good News of today's Gospel is that our *sinfulness* - our pride and self-centeredness - does not repel God. Our God is a God Who gives sinners a new start. It is important that we acknowledge our sinfulness. Our response must be modeled on that of the tax collector in the parable: "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Lk 18:13). The recognition of our inadequacy and sin is necessary for us, if we are to be willing and able to receive transformation through God's grace. Isaiah, Paul, and Peter teach us that even the greatest among us stand in need of conversion. God, Who calls us and commissions us for His service, wants us to realize His presence everywhere and in everyone, to repent of our sins and to remain in readiness to speak and act for Him in our life-circumstances as He shall direct.

2) We need to teach and practice expressions of reverence for the Lord. Today's world desperately needs a "revival of reverence." We need both to recognize God as God and to express that reverence for God through appropriate *bodily* gestures. For example, when we come into Church, we enter the presence of Jesus dwelling in the tabernacle. We need to remember that this is His house, a part of Heaven, and we need to express that remembrance by making a deep bow toward the tabernacle, or, if we are able to kneel, by genuflecting on the right knee before we enter the pew. We should offer him the same reverent recognition when we leave the Church and His Sacramental Presence. We might also remember to give a slight bow of the head whenever we hear, or say, the name of Jesus. The new regulation of bowing one's head before receiving Communion is another beautiful act of reverence. This same sense of reverence can be expressed by keeping the Bible, God's living word to us, in a prominent place in our homes and by kissing it each time we read from it. True reverence for God naturally leads us to the reverent, respectful love of neighbor. Blessed Mother Teresa loved people because she saw *Jesus* in them. That was the same Jesus Whom she revered and experienced in the Holy Eucharist. We, too, will have many opportunities for daily experiences of Christ. So the heart of our mission as Christians is really to find him hidden in our neighbors, and to accept his challenge to us - to love him, to have compassion on him, to practice justice toward him, to be kind to him there. Then it becomes easier for us to forgive injury as he did, and to be reconciled to those with whom we have difficulties. Thus, our mission as his disciples is to seek, to find, and to respond to Him in all people and events.

3) Each of us has a unique mission in the Church. God has a different call for each of us. Because each of us is unique, each of us has a mission which no one else can fulfill. God will use all of us, and particularly what is unique in us, to bring this mission to fulfillment. Our response must be like that of Isaiah: "*Here I am, Lord...send me.*" "I'll do it. I'll play my part. I'll speak to that neighbor, that coworker, that friend, that relative. I'll talk to my daughter about the way she is rearing her children. I'll keep my mouth shut and refuse to gossip or criticize my co-workers or my bosses. I'll pray every day. I'll learn to listen patiently to those in need. I'll do it."

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