Opinion
Spirituality



"Come, follow me. I will make you fishers of people. You will be my disciples." (Wikimedia Commons/Klosterneuburger Evangelienwerk)



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I guess it's not difficult for any of us to see today where the Scriptures are leading us — obviously, to reflect on our call to be a disciple.

Looking back at the first lesson, we have an example from the Hebrew Scriptures, the time of Isaiah, his call to be a prophet, and the overwhelming experience it was when he was in the temple praying and had this extraordinary vision experience of God — that he, Isaiah, was in the presence of God. He felt himself totally unworthy and wanted to depart.

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 10, 2019

Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8

Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 11

Luke 5:1-11

But after Isaiah had proclaimed, "I am a person of unclean lips and I live among people of unclean lips," God forgave and healed. Isaiah realized that when God then spoke and said, "Who am I to send?", he can answer, "Here am I, Lord. Send me."

So he received his call during that deep experience of prayer and became a prophet, one of the most extraordinary of those who proclaim God's Word.

In the second lesson, we have the example of St. Paul, where in his letter to the people at Corinth, he reminded them about his own conversion.

Here, too, we have an example of someone who judged himself to be unworthy, a sinner. "I am the least of the apostles. I do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, I am what I am, and God's grace towards me has not been without fruit."

A sinner, again, but God calls and God makes it possible for this sinner to become a disciple, one who follows and learns and proclaims the message of Jesus.

Then, of course, in the Gospel lesson, it's so clear. The disciples, led by Peter, talk about the same experience that Isaiah and Paul had when Jesus called them. Peter, especially, has this extraordinary sense of Jesus as being the living power of God in their midst and feeling so overwhelmed and unworthy. "Depart from me. I'm a sinner."

But Jesus doesn't depart from Peter or send Peter away. Rather, he calls him: "Come, follow me. I will make you fishers of people. You will be my disciples."

Have we ever thought about the moment when God called me, each of us? It's something we should think about and pray about because each one of us has been called. That's why we're here gathered together in this community of disciples of Jesus, this church. We have been called.

Maybe we don't think of it that way, but it goes back to our baptism. Most of us, I suppose, grew up thinking of baptism when our sins are washed away or we begin to live with the new life of God as sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus. But it's more than that.

There's part of the baptism ceremony that very explicitly makes that sacrament the call to be a disciple. After being plunged into the water and rising up to new life (that symbol of what the waters of baptism mean, that symbol of dying by being plunged into the water and rising to new life), but after that, the minister of baptism anointed us and prayed, "God now anoints you with the chrism of God's saving love. As Jesus was anointed priest, prophet and king, so may you live always as a member of his body."

That's our call: to live as a member of the body of Jesus. We carry out that life by being priest, prophet and leader. Very briefly today as we explore our call, and I hope renew our commitment to follow, we need to talk about what that means.

Prophet means to speak on behalf of God, to proclaim the good news.

First of all, we need to think about priesthood. (I jumped ahead of myself there.) First of all, we're priests, which means we take on the role of Jesus when we come here to church to celebrate the Eucharist. Think of the words of consecration, Jesus saying, "This is my body given for you." That's over the bread.

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Then the cup, "This the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so sins may be forgiven." It's the work of Jesus as a priest.

We're called to be a priest. I think sometimes we come to church and think of ourselves as being part of an audience. We're spectators, we're watching, we're listening to what's going on, and perhaps trying to bring ourselves to enter into it. But actually, we should be actively engaged in the offering because what is happening when Jesus says those words, "This is my body; this is the cup of my blood," Jesus is fulfilling what is proclaimed in the letter of Paul to the church at Philippi.

There's a beautiful passage in the second chapter where Paul is speaking about Jesus and says, "Though he was in the form of God, he did not think of equality with God as something to be clung to, but he emptied himself, became human, fully human, giving himself over to death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God exalted him and raised him up to be the Lord, to live life with God forever pouring forth that love upon the world."

That's what we must do when we celebrate the Eucharist — try to have that mind in us which was in Christ Jesus that we are giving ourselves over with him to be bread for others, giving life to others, being poured forth in love for others as Jesus was.

So when we come to offer the Eucharist, we come not as spectators. We have been anointed priests to offer, together with the celebrant of the Mass ordained as a sacramental priest, but we too share the priesthood of Jesus and actively celebrate that and live that when we come each week to the Eucharist to give ourselves over in love for all. It takes a little effort to do this, to remain aware of what we're doing, and to do it actively each time we celebrate the Eucharist, not as a spectator, not as someone simply watching and listening, but as someone actively engaged with Jesus in this action of the holy Eucharist.

Then we are prophets. Prophets are those who speak for God. How do we speak? Not so much in words, but by our life. We are those who are called by speaking through our actions every day by the way we live, the way we carry out our daily activities. We are proclaiming the good news, which, more than anything else, is summed up

by St. John in his letter to the early community of Christians about who God is: "God is love. Where there is love, there is God. This is the love I mean: not that we loved God, but that God first loved us." That's the message that we proclaim. God first loved us, never stops loving us. God is love.

So when we proclaim by our lives who God is and live according to the way of God, we bring God's love into our daily lives, into our homes, into our families, into our communities, into our world. That love can transform. It can make those who do evil — if we forgive, show love, we can change and transform a situation.

But we have to be ready to reach out, to give of ourselves as Jesus did. God is love and in every way possible, in every circumstance in our daily life, in our community life, in our life as a nation — whatever way it is, we must find a way to show love, which sometimes means forgiveness and reaching out in reconciliation, but showing love. That is the way to speak as prophet, the way to speak God's message, which God spoke through Jesus.

Then to be a leader — that means more than anything else to live authentically so that people will want to follow, not just follow me, but to follow the example that I try to show, the example focusing on Jesus, who Jesus is.

In John's Gospel towards the end, when Jesus is reflecting on his own coming death, he says some very profound words: "I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself."

When I am lifted up — of course, that means on the cross when he is being tortured, and murdered and yet, pours forth love. "I will draw all people to myself." That's the same thing.

Profound as it seems or difficult as it seems, we have to try to do it. That's how we are a leader. We draw people because we follow the way of Jesus and choose not to coerce, use force, but rather to love and pour forth love. "I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself." That is the role of leadership — living authentically the way of Jesus.

So today, we listen about those others who were called by God, and I hope we reflect more deeply how I am called by God to be priest, prophet and leader. Perhaps as we do reflect and try to deeply understand this call that we have been

given, and renew our commitment, we can join with Isaiah, "Here I am, Lord. I will go," when God is searching for who will proclaim the Word.

"Here am I. Send me." Each of us, I hope, can make that declaration today as we continue our celebration of this holy Eucharist. Here am I, Lord. Send me to be your priest, your prophet and your leader.

Editor's note: *This homily was given Feb. 9 at a home Mass in Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. Sign up here to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.*