

## **Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**February 4, 2007**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Our first reading is one of my favorites. It is from the prophet Isaiah who lived about 725 years before Christ. He describes his call from God to be a prophet. The setting is in Jerusalem in the Temple. Notice he is unable to describe what God looked like. He describes God's royal robe, the angels, the sounds and the profound sense of God's holiness. In this experience he becomes aware of his own unworthiness. You will recognize in this passage the inspiration for two familiar hymns: the Holy, Holy which we say or sing at every Mass and the hymn, Here I Am, Lord.

In the other two readings we hear how two other people experienced God in Jesus Christ: Paul in his vision of the Risen Christ and Peter in the miraculous catch of fish.

### **HOMILY**

If we were walking along the street and found a wallet full of money we probably wouldn't say "What luck that all the molecules in the atmosphere just happened to come together right now to produce this money for me to find!" We might like to say that so that we wouldn't have to worry about who might have lost it. But, in spite of the fact that it may have been lucky that we found it, we know that nature doesn't just produce piles of money for people to find. Yet people can look at the planets and stars, the various forms of life on this earth, and many other marvels in this universe that we are still discovering and say "What luck that the molecules floating around this universe somehow came together by accident and produced all of this. Just don't ask where the molecules came from.

Most people prefer to say there was a power greater than we can imagine at work here, a power we call the Creator, the Supreme Being, or simply God. But can we know something more about God than that God is someone greater than we are? That is an important question because some day we hope to be spending a lot of time with God and even in our present everyday lives God can be a source of power and wisdom for us. So that is a very relevant question, how can we get to know God better? What we can figure out on our own is so very limited. It's personal experience that helps us to know more. Many people have claimed to have had personal experiences of God. I'm sure that most of the people here in church have had moments when God's presence became very real to them. Unfortunately those moments are infrequent and usually rather brief.

We see in today's readings that God chose certain individuals who have had special experiences of God and to whom God gave a special mission to teach others about him. Isaiah experienced God in the Temple, most probably while in prayer. After the experience God asked, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" Isaiah answered, "Here I am, send me!" Paul was on his way to arrest people who believed in Jesus when Jesus appeared to him. Through this experience he came to know Jesus as Lord and he experienced that God had chosen him to

preach to the nations. Then we heard about Peter who experienced God in Jesus through a miraculous catch of fish. After Jesus gave Peter a catch of fish that astounded even him, the professional fisherman, Jesus said, "From now on you will be catching people."

Our insert in today's bulletin tells us about the Church and how it grew. I like the way the author of the article describes this growth. He said it wasn't gradual, but it was an explosion, revealing the power of the Spirit at work in the apostles and in the early Church. It was not only Isaiah, Paul and Peter who taught us about God but most of all it was Jesus Christ. And saints and scholars have continued to reveal God to us.

There is a tendency among many Christians to take what they like from the gospels and ignore the rest. If we are to know God, we have to listen also to those elements of God's self-revelation that are not so easy to hear. Following only the parts of the gospel we like will not lead us to God any more than reading only the books you enjoy will get you through college or playing a sport without the discipline of practice or hard work will make you an athlete. The journey to God is often easy and pleasant, but sometimes God takes us through dark valleys, steep hills and rugged terrain. But even in hard times he is always there to help us.

Common sense may convince an open minded person that there is a God, but we have to look further to get to know God better. Our own personal experiences can help us, but they are limited too. We have heard today about three spiritual giants who can teach us a lot more. Through meditation and reflection on the teachings and the testimony of prophets, apostles and saints and especially through the revelation of Jesus Christ we can come to know the God of the universe more personally and more fully. Today we gather in faith and prayer, thanking God for what we have come to know through the experiences and testimony of others, and asking him to enrich the faith and knowledge we have. Amen.

## **First Sunday of Lent**

**February 25, 2007**

**INTRODUCTION:** Any person who has a sense of spirituality knows deep down that we owe our Creator recognition, respect, worship, gratitude and honor. Throughout the history of the human race, honor and recognition were offered in a variety of ways. It was not unusual to find that many primitive tribes offered human sacrifices. God was not honored by this practice, and he revealed this to the Jewish people. Instead they made offerings of the various foods that sustained their lives to indicate they recognized that all they had, including life itself, came from God. In our first reading we hear Moses instructing the people in the proper way to offer their tithes and the first fruits of their land. The reading leads us into the gospel where Jesus tells Satan, and what he tells him is a reminder to all of us, that we owe worship to God only.

**HOMILY:** This past Wednesday we began the holy season of Lent. The word "Lent" is an Old English word for spring. It's an appropriate word. As the season of spring prepares the earth to

break forth into new life, the season of Lent is a time to prepare to break forth, spiritually, into new life. I read that, historically, Lent started out as a time of prayer, fasting and doing good works for those who were preparing to become members of the Church at Easter. These are the people who are going through what we refer to today as the RCIA. Since early Christian communities were quite small (you know they killed people for being Christians then) it would have been an exciting time when a new member was preparing to embrace Christ through baptism. The early Christian communities would join with those preparing for baptism by also making this season a time of prayer, fasting and doing good works. Even though most Churchgoers today are only remotely conscious of new members joining the Church, it is still fitting that this season continue to be a time to prepare for new life. There may be some among us who are perfect but for most of us, our life in Christ can always benefit from some greater or lesser degree of spiritual renewal. In addition, there is our eternal life we all need to prepare for. In the early Church, those who had sinned seriously and publicly did public penance during this time of Lent. By wearing sackcloth and ashes and by asking for prayers, they could prepare themselves for returning to the community before Easter. This is how Lent took on a penitential aspect. Many people today use this time of Lent to repent of their mistakes of the past. Add to this the example of Jesus who prayed and fasted in preparation for his public ministry, and we can all find some kind of motivation to make this a holy season of prayer, fasting and doing good works.

Many of us grew up viewing Lent as a gloomy time when we had to practice difficult forms of self-discipline. Today there is a more joyful side to Lent if we see it as preparing us for a deeper relationship with God. Preparing for other important things in life sometimes requires hard work and self-discipline. Why should we think our spiritual life should somehow be different? St. Paul doesn't think so. Self-discipline is not a bad thing even if it is sometimes hard. Psychologically a person who lacks self-discipline cannot be a mature or happy person, so it is a good thing to learn.

Our world would be a little better and all of us would be a lot happier if each one of us decided to work harder on making ourselves a better person. As we begin the season of Lent, our Scripture readings at Mass will call us to conversion, to change our hearts, to turn a little, or maybe a lot more into the kind of person we know God wants us to be.

As we move into the last two weeks of Lent, however, we begin to focus on Christ's passion. A few years ago a movie entitled the Passion of the Christ came out. It was very moving and it helped us remember what Christ did for us to save us. We often forget. We often forget how much we owe our Creator. One reason why Sunday is dedicated to offering God worship and praise is so we don't forget. We do not offer animals or other food as the Jews did. Instead, we have the perfect sacrifice. Our participation in the Mass unites us with the perfect act of worship and love and obedience offered to the Father by Jesus as he died on the cross.

Our readings today put things in perspective by reminding us of the worship we owe God, our Creator. They remind us we need more than material things to truly live and to be fully human: it's not by bread alone that we live. They remind us God must take priority over everything else

in our lives for God alone deserves our worship. I pray that everyone here will have a spiritually enriching Lent as we prepare for new and more abundant life in Christ.