

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

5th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Isaiah 6.1-8)

The Holy One of Israel

In the collection of the sayings of Isaiah subsequently made, this vision is not the first, but it certainly recounts the first vocation of the prophet.

For Isaiah, God is primarily the Holy One of Israel. This vision of the triple Holy, seated on the throne of glory in the Temple, does all that is possible to convey in words the daunting otherness of the One whose glory fills the whole earth. The human reaction to it can only be acute awareness of uncleanness. Isaiah can only shrink away until his uncleanness has been purged by the cauterization of his lips. No human being can see God and live.

The glory seen by Isaiah (and by Moses on Mount Sinai) is but the outer fringe, but it leaves the human visionary stunned and aghast at the contrast between the divine holiness and human unworthiness.

Throughout the Book that bears his name, Isaiah will revert again and again to the awesome holiness of the Lord. God is our loving Father, but there can be no neglecting the distance lying between Creator and created. At the same time we are attracted and daunted.

Question:

How does your idea of holiness fit with Isaiah's?

Second reading:

(1 Corinthians 15.1-11)

The Earliest Gospel

The most precious element of this reading is the first traditional recital of the Good News of Christ's death and Resurrection, which the earliest Christians already saw as fulfilling the scriptures. We can tell that by Paul's time this recital was already traditional.

First, Paul here uses the terms used by the rabbis for the handing on of tradition, 'I taught you what I had been taught myself.' Second, the language is not quite Paul's own; for instance, for scriptural fulfilment Paul always writes 'as it is written', whereas here we twice have 'in accordance with the scriptures', which Paul himself never says.

To witness to the Resurrection of Christ was the primary task of the apostles. For us, too, it is the primary task; not merely by our words, but by the way we behave, we need to live in the awareness that Christ's Resurrection after his endurance of humiliation and dreadful suffering is the basic fact of life. The basic factor in Christian faith and witness is not the empty tomb but the experience of the apostles in meeting the Risen Christ. This is what unbelievably transformed them from being a defeated and hopeless rabble, huddled in hiding, into courageous and enterprising witnesses..

Question:

Is this the nucleus of Christian faith that you would write?

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Gospel:

(Luke 5.1-11)

The Call of the First Disciples

There were obviously several different versions circulating in the early Church of the call of the first disciples. In Mark and Matthew, Jesus is passing along the shore of the lake when he calls two pairs of disciples. In John, it takes place where John the Baptist was preaching.

The story in Luke has many similarities to the story at the end of John's gospel after the Resurrection, when the risen Christ commissions Peter: a night of failed fishing, followed by a huge catch in obedience to Jesus' instructions. The Church has always seen this as a sign of the need for obedience to Christ.

Luke's version here combines the same play on words as in Mark and Matthew about fishing for people. Luke sets the story a little later: in Mark, the fishermen have never seen Jesus and follow him blindly; in Luke, Peter and his friends have already got to know Jesus before they are commissioned. A special feature in Luke is Peter's cry that he is an unworthy sinner. Luke often teaches us that no one can be a disciple of Jesus without first admitting their sinfulness: Zacchaeus the tax collector, and the woman who wept at Jesus' feet (Luke 7.36-50) are other examples.

Question:

What do you find special and important about Luke's account of the call of the disciples?
