



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-February 6th 2022

Readings: Isaiah 6: 1-8, Psalm 137, 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11: Luke 5: 1-11

To the casual reader the reference in Isaiah to ‘the year that King Uzziah died’ scarcely merits attention. This is unfortunate because Uzziah is no mean monarch. His reign, the most prosperous since Solomon, lasted some fifty two years and saw remarkable stability and military success. Even his declining years of isolation and leprosy enjoyed a harmonious continuity as he shared the regency with his son and heir. So the year in which King Uzziah died would be a landmark date for the inhabitants of Judah. Most had known no other monarch. It would be the equivalent of the passing of Victoria or indeed our own sovereign Elizabeth.

It is then in this momentous year that the great prophet Isaiah – whose works and school of prophecy would span the centuries to come – received his call to that dangerous and, all too often, unwelcome ministry, prophecy. And what a call it is.

Isaiah, in the Temple, is granted a vision of the glory of God – he is present in the throne room of the Presence. He sees the real King of All and is privy to the courts of Heaven. He views the attendant train of the closest to God, the Seraphim, the burning ones aflame with the fire of

the divine, and hears their song – a song which we feebly imitate in the Mass - Sanctus Sanctus Sanctus.

Isaiah's reaction is instantaneous. In the Presence of the All Holy he is utterly conscious of his unholiness, of how far short he falls of the glory of God, how desperately adrift of the purposes of God the society in which he lives. The declaration of his unworthiness and his 'lostness' is met by an extraordinary action. The seraph takes a burning coal from the altar of incense, the source of the glorious smoke filling the Temple, the sign of prayer and offering, and purges the prophet's mouth. Only then can he respond to the call of God – not in his own righteousness but in the purity of the divine and holy.

Though Isaiah's calling would take some beating, we might also note that, in very different circumstances, the other vocations traced in today's scriptures have in common a profound encounter with the Divine. St Paul recalls the day of meeting the Risen Christ. Full of fell purpose Paul is unseated and humbled and blinded and changed his zeal re-purposed for the kingdom. Similarly, on the shoreline the 'Fab Four' are called by the One in whose Presence their world is turned upside down in the very midst of their working lives. Peter's response, as Paul's, as Isaiah's, is that of utter reality summarised most succinctly perhaps in the words of the old Latin Mass, 'non sum dignus', I am unworthy. Faced with the terrible holiness of God that is the only response that we can make. Any vocation that issues from a sense of right or worthiness is phony.

And we pray always for vocations..... but we also needs be aware of the need for a renewed spiritual vision. When we come to Mass are we aware that the same God who confronted Isaiah in the Temple in glory is

exalted here. The smoke that rises is from the fire of His altar. That we worship with the Seraphim.

Are we conscious that the same Christ whose blinding light irradiated the Mount of Transfiguration and which decked St Paul on the Damascus road is truly present on the altar here?

Do we recognise the One who, walking on the shoreline, gets into our little barque and dares us to put out into the deep where we have failed to harvest and do what He asks?

These are questions that lead us from the immanent to the transcendent, from the here and now and into eternity and back. This is the key to recapturing our spiritual vision, that sense of the numinous, the awareness of the Presence. Is that how we worship? Does the priest give any indication in his demeanour that this is what is truly going on as we walk the borderline between Heaven and Earth. This is not an act but an actualisation of the supervening reality. Our feet remain firmly on earth but our hearts are in Heaven. All vocations emerge from the encounter. All serious ministry is born of that insistent and overwhelming call of God to the one whose first response, in the light of His glory, is to know our utter unworthiness and complete dependence on God. And whose second response, in the light of the urgency of salvation is to reply, 'Here I am. Send me.