NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Jesus' call is to all

Thomas Gumbleton | Feb. 11, 2010 The Peace Pulpit

A couple of weeks ago, you may recall the gospel lesson told us about what happened after Jesus had spent the six weeks of prayer and solitude in the desert. He came back into Nazareth where he had grown up. He went into the synagogue. Remember, he was given the book to read and he unrolled the scroll to the book of the Prophet Isaiah, where it is written those powerful words that Jesus read, "The spirit of God is upon me. God will send me to proclaim good news to the poor, to give the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim God's year of jubilee."

Then Jesus sat down. Everybody was looking at him, and he said, "This day, this scripture passage is fulfilled, even as you listen." Jesus was proclaiming what his mission was in this world, that he had come to do all of those things: proclaim good news, especially to the poor and deprived, to free the oppressed, to heal the brokenhearted. Jesus had come to serve and to raise people up.

Now, a couple of weeks later, Jesus is beginning to share that mission. He is calling his first disciples in today's passage. He's going to commission them to go out and do all that he is called to do.

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 6:1-2, 3-8

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

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Full text of the readings [1]

Our lessons today, all three of the lessons in fact, show us how through Jesus, God continues to call people to be commissioned to do the very work that Jesus himself came to do. Each of these lessons shows us something about how this call happens. In the first lesson, we find Isaiah, the priest from the temple, who is praying and suddenly experiences a very profound presence of God. Isaiah is overwhelmed by it. In fact, he becomes afraid. He becomes aware of his own unworthiness.

He says, "I'm not ready to be what you're asking me to be, a prophet, one who proclaims your word. I am a person of unclean lips from a nation of unclean lips," but then, God shows how God can heal and change a person and make that person ready to do what God asks. Then Isaiah says, "Here am I. Send me." He's ready to be what God is asking of him, to carry out the commission that God is giving to him.

In the second lesson, toward the end of that lesson, Paul, as he began to proclaim, reminded the people of Corinth of what he had taught them, especially about the good news, the resurrection of Jesus. At the end, he begins to reflect on himself. He said, "I am the least of the apostles, not even really worthy to be an apostle, but God raised me up and made me ready. God sent me and so, though I am the least, I am still one who proclaims God's word, carries out the commission of Jesus."

In the gospel lesson, we see the same thing again. Peter has this profound experience, suddenly being aware of God's holiness, God's goodness, and in contrast, his own unworthiness. He falls at the feet of Jesus and says, "Depart. Leave me. I am a sinner," but Jesus says, "I can change that and I can make you one who is not a fisherman who only fishes for fish in the sea, but you will begin to catch people, to draw people into my community." Then Peter is ready to accept the commission of Jesus.

That work of Jesus to draw people to be his disciples continues down through all of history, to today.

Jesus is calling every one of us in this community to carry on his work, to be commissioned to carry on his work. That goes on constantly in the church. We should remember that because sometimes I think when we hear about God or Jesus calling people, we think it's to the priesthood, to be a priest, or perhaps to be one who joins a religious community, to become a nun, a sister or a brother, but that isn't the case.

Jesus calls all. Priests and religious, the way we know them today, came much later than this time of Jesus. Jesus called people who wanted to be baptized and confirmed, who were willing to accept that, to carry on his work. I think it's important to realize because all the examples we have today are men, but just a short time later in chapter eight of Luke's Gospel, we're told how the 12 followed him, but also many women who had been healed: Mary, called Magdalene; Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; Susanna, and other women who provided for them out of their own funds.

So men and women are called to do this work of Jesus in the church, to carry out his commission. You are being called today to renew the commitment that was made for you at baptism, or perhaps made for yourself at baptism or confirmation. Each one of us must constantly recall and renew our commitment. Like Isaiah said, "Send me," or Peter said, "Yes, I'm ready now to be a fisher of people," or Paul, ready to proclaim the good news.

As Father John mentioned at the beginning, I was in Haiti last week and there, I experienced something that reminds me very clearly of how God does call and renew the call. One of the people I was with for a while in Haiti was a friend of mine, Father Andre Pierre, who is the rector of the Catholic University in Haiti. He told me about his experience which really became a new sense of his call, his commission to follow Jesus, to do the work of Jesus.

On the day of the earthquake, he had a meeting scheduled with Archbishop Joseph Miot, and he was on his way to that meeting which was to take place at 4:30 in the afternoon. He was caught in traffic and he was going to be late, so he called the Archbishop and talked to him, and said, "I'm a bit delayed but I'm on the way. I'll be there very shortly." So ten minutes or so later, at about 4:40, he arrived at the building and drove into the parking lot. He got out of his car and was ready to go into the building.

The archbishop was on the second floor, on a balcony overlooking the parking lot. He waved to Father Pierre, who waved back, and he was ready to go into the building. Just as he went up the first step, someone called him and stopped him. He stopped to visit for a few minutes, and that's when the earthquake happened. The building came crashing down. The archbishop was crushed under the debris and killed, and the others in the building were killed; Father Andre Pierre was spared.

As he was telling me this, he was not telling it as though, "Well, somehow God protected me but God did not protect them." That isn't what he experienced. It wasn't that sense, because God wouldn't kill some and save others, but what he experienced was a deep sense of the gift of life. At that moment, he realized in probably more profound and deep ways than he ever had before, what a gift it is to be alive, to have life, and it's a gift that God has given to us. It is a gift that we maintain only because God sustains us at every instance.

We're always gifted by God at every moment of our lives. Sometimes, it takes a profound experience like that to make us realize what a blessing it is that God has given to us. Because of that experience, Father Pierre has realized how important it was to make good use of that gift. So in a sense, he was ready to say again as he had said before in his life, "Here am I, God. Send me."

He renewed his commitment, among other things, as the rector of the university. He intends especially to try to increase the university's capacity to train people in health care because it's so clear that's one of the things they dramatically need in Haiti. So he wants to now make sure that the university where he is the leader, the

president, will respond more fully to the needs of all the people of Haiti, not just the elite who can afford to go to the university, but all the people of Haiti, especially the poor.

He is more committed than ever to proclaim good news to the poor, give the blind new sight, and heal the brokenhearted. He renews his commitment and I suggest this morning as we hear these passages from the scriptures of God's call to various people, their experience of God in their lives and their willingness then to respond by saying, "Here am I, Lord. Send me," that every one of us this morning should commit ourselves to take some time to enter into quiet prayer, to realize the gift that God has given us in the gift of life and all the blessings that God has given to us.

Maybe we will become aware that we're not really worthy of all these, but God makes us worthy. He makes us ready. Perhaps each of us can find new ways in which we can carry out the commission Jesus gave to us, that commission to proclaim good news to the poor, that whole passage that Jesus says is my mission. I hope every one of us, out of a period of quiet prayer, will say with ever greater fervor, "Here am I, Lord. Send me."

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