

CELEBRATE SABBATH

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Purposefulness is the ultimate virtue that inspires
and moves us to fulfill our God-given purpose.**

Isaiah 6:1-2, 3-8

Isaiah was a priest, prophet and counselor to King Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah during a 40-year period from 740-701 BCE. He had a fearsome and awe-inspiring experience of God and God's calling, as he ministered in the temple. Before the holiness of God, he became deeply conscious of his own inadequacy, unworthiness, sinfulness and cried out "Woe is me...I am doomed...I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips". Nevertheless, by God's power, Isaiah's feelings of inadequacy and sinfulness turned into an experience of being cleansed by God and being readied for the ministry as a prophet. An admitted sinner became a prophet of the Lord. Isaiah began to speak for God, calling his people to repent so they could know the healing and forgiveness that only God can give.

This is an inspiration for all ministers: We are chosen to be ministers, not because we are worthy or worthier than others. But even in our unworthiness, God calls us and heals our brokenness, graces us and empowers us and send us to fulfill his mission, to speak his truth, to proclaim his good news.

Psalms 138

This Psalm begins thanking God for revealing himself as "steadfast love and faithfulness". The Psalmist says that God has shown himself to be kinder than we could have ever known. The exiles were back in Jerusalem and the new temple was up and dedicated. The Psalmist thanks God with his whole heart that he is no longer guided by the gilded Babylonian gods. Unlike the Babylonian gods who could only fall off wagons, our God has revealed himself as steadfast in loving kindness by carrying his people to safety (Isaiah 46-54). The Psalmist says, "I have now experienced your hesed for myself. The day is coming when all the rulers will abandon worship of Bel and Nebo and other false Gods and worship Yahweh.

**Thank you, Yahweh, with all my heart;
I sing praise to you before the angels.
I worship at your holy temple and praise your name\
because of your constant love and faithfulness,
because you have shown that you and your word are exalted.**

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

In this excerpt, Paul tells us that his call was God's favor or grace and that he was last among the witnesses to whom the risen Jesus had appeared. Paul calls himself "last" and "least" and "one born abnormally." However, he says, he has "worked harder than all the others" and adds "not on my own but through the grace of God within me", "I am what I am by the grace of God" (v. 10). The grace of God has transformed an enemy of the gospel into one of its greatest defenders and proclaimers. He says that he was blessed and brought into the company of many great men like Peter, James, the twelve apostles and other 500 people to whom the risen Christ appeared. By God's Grace...

This experience of Paul calls us to be humble. It is awe-inspiring to remember that we are called and sent with a mission that is far greater than us...far greater than all of us put together!

Luke 5:1-11

In this excerpt, Luke gives us a vivid description of the call of the first disciples Simon Peter, James and John who were fishermen, called to be fishers of people. Luke tells us that people pressed in on Jesus to hear the word of God, that Jesus asked for their boat for proclaiming his message, that he asked them to lower the net for another try at fishing, that Simon said, "at your word I will lower the nets", that Jesus called them to follow him, that Peter acknowledged his own inadequacy, and that "they left everything and became his followers".

This episode teaches us many things:

Jesus called the first disciples while they were fishing, doing their usual, normal work. The call of God comes to most of us during our daily chores, as we go about fulfilling our responsibilities and not through some extraordinary, earth-shattering events. Be faithful! Be alert and attentive to the promptings of the spirit. Discern God's plan as he reveals it to you during the course of daily events.

Jesus asked for their boat for him to teach from. Make your boats available for proclaiming the good news of Jesus.

Jesus asked them to cast their net into deep water. Be willing to venture into the deep, to unfamiliar and uncharted territories....try different approaches...try little harder...go a little deeper.

Peter acknowledged his inadequacy, "Leave me Lord, I am a sinful man". Be humble. Know your limitations. You are involved in something bigger and greater than yourself.

Jesus said, "Come with me...I will make you....". Trust in the Lord. He will empower you to do the work that he is calling you to do.

Saint of the Day, February 9 - St. Josephine Bakhita and 20 other saints are

remembered this day

Josephine Margaret Bakhita was born around 1869 in the village of Olgossa in the Darfur region of Sudan. Historians believe that sometime in February 1877, Josephine was kidnapped by Arab slave traders. She was bought and sold many times. As a slave, her experiences varied from fair treatment to cruel. Her owners mistreated her, punished her cruelly and often incapacitated her. The wife of one of her masters ordered her to be scarred. As her mistress watched, ready with a whip, another woman drew patterns on her skin with flour, then cut into her flesh with a blade. She rubbed the wounds with salt to make the scars permanent. She would suffer a total of 114 scars from this abuse.

In 1883, the Turkish general sold her to the Italian Vice Consul, Callisto Legani. He was a much kinder master and he did not beat her. When it was time for him to return to Italy, she begged to be taken with him, and he agreed. After the arrival in Italy, she was given away to another family as a gift and she served them as a nanny. When her new mistress decided to travel to Sudan without Josephine, she placed her in the custody of the Canossian Sisters in Venice. While she was in the custody of the sisters, she came to learn about God. She was deeply moved by her time with the sisters and discerned a call to follow Christ.

When her mistress returned from Sudan, Josephine refused to leave. Her mistress spent three days trying to persuade her to leave the sisters, but Josephine remained steadfast. The superior of the institute complained to Italian authorities on Josephine's behalf. The case went to court, and the court found that slavery had been outlawed in Sudan before Josephine was born. So, she could not be lawfully made slave. She was declared free. For the first time in her life, Josephine was free and could choose what to do with her life. She chose to remain with the Canossian Sisters.

She was baptized on January 9, 1890 and took the name Josephine Margaret and Fortunata. (Fortunata is the Latin translation for her Arabic name, Bakhita). She also received the sacraments of her first holy communion and confirmation on the same day. The Archbishop who gave her the sacraments was Giuseppe Sarto, the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice, who would later become Pope Pius X.

Josephine took her final vows on December 8, 1896 in the religious order of the Canossian Daughters of Charity. For the next 42 years of her life, she worked as a cook and a doorkeeper at the convent. She also traveled and visited other convents telling her story to other sisters and preparing them for work in Africa. She was gentle and charismatic and was often referred to lovingly as the "little brown sister" or honorably as the "black mother." She died on the evening of February 8, 1947. Pope John Paul II canonized her on October 1, 2000.

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