

+Reverend Billy Graham tells of a time early in his ministry when he arrived in a small town to preach a sermon. Wanting to mail a letter, he asked a young boy where the post office was. When the boy had told him, Graham thanked him and said, "If you come to my revival this evening, I'll witness how we are to find our way to Heaven."

"I don't think I'll be there," the boy said. "Why?" Graham asked him. "Because you can't even find your way to the post office, no less to Heaven." This weekend the Lord invites us to find a deeper calling.

Today's Scriptures are united to offer us a very simple, yet very profound reflection. Go back to that magnificent vision you heard in the first reading. A little background to that vision will help. The man who is the subject of that reading, the prophet Isaiah, lived in the time of a man named King Uzziah. He was considered a good and honest king. Well, Uzziah, the beloved king, got leprosy and eventually died.

In this context we meet Isaiah. He is an aristocratic young man and he is grieving over the king, whom, most likely, he knew because he moved in those circles. And today's Scripture picks up the scene where, in his grief over the dead king, Isaiah had gone to the Temple to pray. And in the Temple he has what we would call a religious experience.

Instinctively he did what Peter would do and what you and I would do: in the presence of God, in the presence of Holiness, his own sinfulness becomes apparent and he cries out, "I am a man of unclean lips!" Notice that Peter says the same thing, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

What is the significant in both readings is that the Lord ignored their pleas. God did not depart, but called these sinners, a call that cleansed them of their darkness and sin. Once cleansed, Isaiah is open to hear God's voice, God's call. And the substance of that call is that God asks Isaiah to do something special with his life. The Lord says, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" And to his amazement, Isaiah hears his own voice respond, "Here I am, Lord send me!"

Now you have to appreciate once more Isaiah came from the upper crust and was surely destined for a life in the court, a life of luxury and a life of power. He has this religious experience that God is calling him to something deeper, and he knows his life can never be the same. He is a changed man, and then and there gives up his privileged life and becomes a holy prophet for God. And all because he was called to something deeper.

Saul encountered this, as did the men in today's gospel. They immediately protest their sinfulness and are afraid. Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." Henceforth they would no longer catch fish, they would catch people. And, of course, it did exact a price from some of them.

As we listen to these readings on this particular Sunday, we have to open ourselves to their main thrust that life can never remain stagnant. In any kind of life, to be regarded at all as life, it must move outward. To stand still is to die, or at least to miss out on the life that God offers us. We must grow, no matter what our state of life, as all have something to witness.

+What a glorious faith word is "Nevertheless!" Are you willing to say it today whatever your circumstances may be? A man says, "Lord, I'm up in years and I have cancer and my chances of beating it are almost nil. I really would like for my doctor to help me overdose so I can just exit as quickly as possible. What possible purpose could I still have on this earth?"

(But here comes that word) ..."NEVERTHELESS, if You want me to model a faith that not even cancer can touch, if You want me to cast my burden upon You and allow you to sustain me, if You want me to show people how to die as well as live, with courage and conviction. Then Lord, I will launch into the deep with you."

Yes, sometimes people protest, "I'm set in my ways. When I was younger I had a dream and perhaps even heard a call, but I was too busy to answer and life passed me by. At any rate, I'm too old at this stage in my life".

+There was an article in the Wall Street Journal, some years back, about a man named Harry Lipsig. Harry Lipsig is a lawyer and for fifty years had a law firm. He himself didn't practice law; he just ran the shop, did the business end of the firm. Yet he decided at the age of 88 to get out of the office and get into actual practice.

The reason behind the move was an interesting case that came to the firm. It was the case of a woman who was suing New York City because a drunken police officer had struck and killed her 71-year-old husband with a patrol car. She argued that the city had deprived her of her husband's future earning potential. The city argued, understandable, that at the age of 71 he didn't have much future earning potential! They thought they had a pretty clever defense until they realized that the woman's argument about her husband's future earning power was being advanced by an 88-year-old lawyer. The city settled.

Again the Scripture comes back and asks these questions: Is God calling you from a too self-indulgent lifestyle to one of helpful concern for people who are less fortunate than our self? Is God asking you to encourage those who, because of hardship in their lives, or poverty, struggle with overwhelming odds to see it through? Is God calling you with your wisdom and experience, to something more? Is God calling you to some generosity of time or some generosity of money?

In other words, at any stage and any age of our lives, we're always alive, we're always being challenged to be more than what we are. We are being called to outgrow our past and our present for something more. We are reminded that there are untapped dimensions in our lives; that before we die, to be full and integral people, we ought to respond to the call of God. That's what the Scripture is telling us.

The Scripture offers us a choice: seize wealth, fame, material things-or- express what is the noblest and deepest within you. The point is, the Lord needs you. The world needs those who would not merely catch fish, but catch people in the unconditional love of God. The truth of the matter is that the voice of God comes to us at any stage and age and asks us the question it asked Isaiah, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for me?" The Scripture prompts us to answer, "Here I am, Lord; send me."