



Come and See!

February 10, 2019

The Word...

Then I said, "Woe is me, I am doomed!
For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips;
yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"
Then one of the seraphim flew to me,
holding an ember that he had taken with tongs from the altar.
He touched my mouth with it, and said, "See, now that this has touched your lips,
your wickedness is removed, your sin purged."
Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
"Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" "Here I am," I said; "send me!"
(from Is 6:1-8)

Pondering the Word...

I recently purchased a three-volume translation of the Hebrew Bible, the life's work of Hebrew scholar, Dr. Robert Alter. His commentary is enlightening and, at times, humorous. He makes a point of noting that it goes unmentioned how painful it would have been for Isaiah to have his mouth burned by the ember from the altar. I've often mused, "Gee, how did he answer God so quickly with those burnt lips?!"

Scripture is a compilation of myth and factual history, embellished and elaborated, a great work of art, with stories and images that help the reader envision the drama and emotions of the characters and the situations in which they find themselves. The themes are universal, transcending time and space; it really is an amazing read! It's impossible to know what Isaiah's call was like, but it was pretty powerful at least for him!

Like Moses, Jeremiah, and most of the prophets (and like Paul and Peter in today's other readings), Isaiah knows he is totally unworthy to be in the presence of the Lord, much less to speak for him. I think Isaiah did have to go through some painful experiences—a cleansing of sorts—to surrender his own doubts and assumptions, and to put aside his own will in favor of God's.

It's interesting...calls from God often come in the midst of challenges, sorrow, doubt...even in the midst of grave sin (think of Paul on the road to Damascus). God doesn't call perfect people—as if there are any. God calls those who've known pain, abandonment, and fear. God calls sinners. Is God calling you?

Living the Word...

Can you think of a time when God 'spoke' to you amid some difficulty or sadness in your life? We often hear God most clearly in the wake, right after a storm. To what might God be calling you? Have you been able to respond? Isaiah might have recovered quickly from his painful experience to respond to God right away, but for most of us, healing our "burnt lips" takes a while. We may not be ready to answer God. We may still have our doubts about ourselves, and even about God. If you are struggling to answer God's call, remember Jesus' words to Peter today: "Do not be afraid." Summon the courage to stand up and say, "Here I am. Send me!"

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Feb 11: *"You fixed the earth upon its foundation...With the ocean, as with a garment, you covered it..."* (Ps 104)

Recently, I've been seeing lots of images of the ocean in rough shape: enormous blooms of algae killing thousands of fish; starfish and coral dying in record numbers; and plastic—tons and tons of plastic—floating far out into the great expanses. The earth's garment is fraying, looking ragged and worn—not at all like the beautiful robe God placed around her at creation. If you have not read the Pope Francis encyclical, *Laudete Si'*, on the care for our common home, I encourage you to spend time reading and considering his words. Read it with your children and come up with ways your family can start to make a difference. Pray together the beautiful prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. It is our children who will pay the very high price for our disregard and waste. (https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf).

Feb 12: *"When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you set in place—what is man that you should be mindful of him, or the son of man that you should care for him?"* (Ps 8)

I am reminded of St. Augustine's quote from *Confessions*: *"Men go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty waves of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, yet pass over the mystery of themselves without a thought."* Like Isaiah, Paul and Peter from Sunday's readings, we can be overwhelmed by our unworthiness: 'Why would God care about me?' If that sounds like you talking, take time to reflect on the mystery of God's image made manifest in you. Think about how great a gift life really is, and how you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Listen to Paul's words from Sunday: *"By the grace of God I am what I am,"* and commit to believe in God's grace that is uniquely yours.

Feb 13: *"Nothing that enters from outside can defile; but things that come out from within are what defile."* (Mk 7:14-23)

On any given day, we can access hundreds of news stories telling us what we should and should not eat; several will be about not eating what we were told to eat last year! Taking care of our bodies—the temples of the Holy Spirit—is important, but Jesus reminds us to pay extra attention to our souls. Make sure to nourish your soul with peaceful, gracious reading and prayer, and get plenty of exercise reaching out to others.

Feb 14: *"The LORD God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone."* (Gn 2:18-25)

No, I'm not going to use my soapbox to discuss the question of celibacy! These days, this verse has a broader and more pressing message. Psychologists warn of increasing isolation due to social media. We know from studies in the 1900s that babies fail to thrive without human touch. Recent studies show the negative effects on infants whose parents look at their phones during feeding times versus looking into the child's eyes. Real live human contact, touch, and interaction, even for the most introverted of us, is essential to our health and well-being. Do you know someone who is alone most of the time? Make a commitment to visit on a regular basis. If you find yourself becoming more withdrawn, seek out people with similar interests. Ironically, you can find interest groups that do get together in person in public places on Meetup.com which is available in most major cities. Be judicious, of course, but also be willing to step out and make new friends. Don't go it alone.

Feb 15: *"Blessed is he whose fault is taken away, whose sin is covered... I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I covered not. I said, "I confess my faults to the LORD," and you took away the guilt of my sin."* (Ps 32)

These days, people seem less willing to take responsibility for their hurtful, sinful words and actions, and they often blame others. Finger-pointing started with Adam and Eve (see tomorrow's reading from Genesis) and we've been trying to pass the buck ever since! In the verses prior to this passage, the psalmist acknowledges the misery of keeping silent about our sins and the relief of coming clean with God. *"Our great transgression is not that we commit sins—temptation is strong and our strength is slight! No, our transgression is that at every instant we can turn to God—and we do not turn!"* (Rabbi Simcha Bunim) If you are carrying the weight of sin, turn to God. Ask God to help you resolve the pain your sin has caused.

Feb 16: *"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart."* (Ps 90)

"I wish I could have known earlier that you have all the time you'll need right up to the day you die." (William Wiley)
So really...what are you waiting for?