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St Thomas' Huron Street
Epiphany V
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May I speak in the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

The common thread uniting each of our readings this morning is that each one brings into view a dramatic, transformative, personal encounter between God and humanity. Yet, the common thread does not end there because each reading also reveals how such an encounter issues forth into a new call, a new task, even while those involved recognize their own limitations and unworthiness in being addressed and called by God in the first place.

In other words, each of the readings today vividly and boldly portray how, to quote the prophet Isaiah from elsewhere: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Is 55:10-11).

In our OT lesson, in what is known as his inaugural vision, the prophet Isaiah saw “the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple” and the seraphs actively worshipping him. And, what is Isaiah’s response? He says, as he is granted vision into the things of heaven, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have

seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” A means of purifying his sin and guilt is provided and, emboldened by this divine extension of mercy and grace through the seraph, Isaiah hence offers himself up to be the messenger of the Lord to his people saying, “Here am I; send me!”

In today’s Epistle, St Paul makes reference to his conversion as described in the Acts of the Apostles. Saul the zealous persecutor of Christians, while on the road to Damascus, sees “a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining around him and his companions.” The light blinds him and knocks him to the ground. And a voice speaks to him in Hebrew saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” To which Saul asks, “Who are you, Lord?” And, the Lord answers, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But you get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me...I am sending you to the Gentiles...to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light.” In First Corinthians, St Paul describes his unique task which come out of the grace of this transformative encounter in much less dramatic terms simply as the handing on of the good news which he himself received, though he, recognizing his unworthiness, refers to himself as ‘last of all’, ‘one untimely born’, the ‘least of the apostles’, ‘unfit to be called an apostle’, because he persecuted the church of God.

And, in St Luke's Gospel, we hear about, how following their Master's advice, Simon and the others in the boat, overcoming their sense of failure and futility thus far, put out their nets into the deep and catch so many fish that their boat begins to sink! And, grasping what this act says about the identity of Jesus, Simon Peter's response is to fall down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" To which Jesus replies, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." As soon as he and the others return to shore, we are told, Simon, James and John embark on this new work which they have been called into, leaving everything behind to follow Christ.

In all three readings this morning we, therefore, find the same dynamic at work: an encounter with God, a sense of unworthiness and sinfulness in the presence of God, yet the divine grace and mercy needed for the one encountering God to know themselves to be called and equipped to live out their calling despite their awareness of their own obvious limitations and liabilities.

And so, these readings today invite all of us to reflect on these three elements brought out by these texts:

1. Where have we encountered and believed ourselves to be addressed by God in our past experience?

2. They invite us to consider what we are supposed to do with our sense of littleness, brokenness, inadequacy that we carry throughout our lives as a burden, which we often work so hard to repress and deny.
3. And, we are invited by them finally to consider what unique task or variety of tasks God has called us to take up to serve him, for each one of us has been called by Christ uniquely and personally to follow him by the good news that has been handed down to us in the Church.

And as we prayerfully do so, let us be reminded by today's Gospel that not only is Christ Lord of Creation, the powerful King above all gods, to whom belong "the strengths of the hills" and the "seas" but Christ is also Lord of the opaque and chaotic depths of the human heart, of our hearts. After all, amidst the language speaking of the depths of our trouble or the unfathomable and unconquerable heights and depths of the Created world, how often does the psalmist, too, remind us, in various ways, that the inward heart is 'deep' (Ps 64:6)!

Putting our whole trust in his mercy and grace, let us therefore ask for the divine assistance that we may know the power of God's presence in our midst and so find ourselves renewed in life and in our calling, despite our unworthiness, to the honour and glory of the Father, renewed by the Holy Spirit, both now and evermore.

Amen.