

If I were to ask, "What is the main theme in today's readings?" I have a feeling that some of you would say, "Vocation." And you'd be right, vocation is in there. In the reading from Isaiah, "God asks "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" and Isaiah jumps up and says "Here I am! Send me!" In the second reading, we see how Paul has responded to his call to be the Apostle to the Gentile. Finally, in the gospel we see Peter, James, and John leaving everything behind to follow Jesus. So yeah, vocation is a big part of the readings.

Maybe others would say, we can't do anything without God. And you'd be right. The call to a vocation comes from God. It was God who called Isaiah. Paul's mission to the Gentiles was only successful because he preached Christ crucified and everything he did came out of his initial encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. As for Peter and the other apostles--we never see them catch a fish in the gospels unless Jesus tells them to cast out their nets. When they do what Jesus tells them to, things go well. When they try things on their own initiative things get messy.

There is a third theme in the readings that maybe you picked up on but everybody is hoping I'll skip it. Isaiah, Peter, and Paul all recognized that they were sinful men.

Isaiah feared for his life because he recognized that nothing unclean could enter into God's presence. Peter knew that his sinfulness made him unworthy to be in the Lord's presence, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Paul considered himself to be unfit to be called an apostle because he had persecuted the church.

Isaiah, Peter, and Paul all recognized their sinfulness and they admitted it. How did God respond? Did he strike Isaiah down? Did Jesus jump out of the boat and go in search of someone who was sinless? Did Jesus reject Paul? No. Isaiah was purified with the ember from the altar. Jesus didn't even respond to Peter's confession. Instead he told Peter not to be afraid and then he upped the ante by telling him that his life was about to be radically changed. As for Paul...it was Jesus himself who knocked Paul to the ground and blinded him with light in the first place. Jesus didn't reject these men. On the contrary, he sought them out.

So...Recognition of sinfulness. Saint John Paul the Great said that the "greatest sin of our times is the loss of the sense of sin." Actually, when he said that, he was quoting something that Pope Pius XII said back in 1946. Modern culture tells us that the truths we cling to depend on our own point of view. There is no absolute truth and if there is no absolute truth, then anything goes. I am the

one who determines what is right for me and you determine what is right for you. We are unable to recognize what sin is anymore. The loss of the sense of sin is not just the greatest sin of our time, it's also one of the greatest tragedies of our time.

We are all wounded in one way or another. Some of those wounds come from other people, many of the wounds are wounds we inflict on ourselves. Ultimately, though, it is sin that wounds us. If we don't recognize sin, how can we be healed? If we don't recognize that our relationship with God and others is damaged by sin, how can we seek reconciliation? If we don't recognize that sin is at the root of our broken relationships, we deny God the opportunity to heal us. This is a terrible tragedy.

It's natural for us to shy away from thinking about sin. We feel guilty. We feel ashamed. But we need to remember what Paul wrote in the letter to the Romans, where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. It is precisely in our weakness that God becomes most powerful. When we realize that we have sinned, our defenses drop, we become more humble. In those moments when we turn back to God, God is able to do things with us that he can't do when we are full of pride.

I'm not saying we should all go out and after Mass and start sinning. I'm not trying to glorify sin or say that we should rejoice in it. We *should* rejoice in the fact that we have an ever merciful God who constantly calls us back to himself. We have a God who doesn't just wait for us to come home...but when he sees us coming up the road he runs out to meet us. We have a God who goes out in search of us and when he finds us, he picks us up and carries us on his shoulders and rejoices that we have been found.

If you find yourself like Isaiah, saying "Woe is me. I am doomed." Or if you find yourself face down on the ground crying out to Jesus, "depart from me Lord, I am a sinful man or a sinful woman or sinful child", let Jesus reach down and pick you up. Let him wipe off the dirt and mud. Let him bandage up the wounds. Let him heal whatever might be broken inside of you. Then...let him look into your eyes. Listen to the compassion in his voice when he says, "It doesn't matter what you have done. I absolve you of your sins. I forgive you. I love you."