

Homily for Fifth Sunday

One of our greatest needs in life is to feel valuable; that our life matters; and that we are worthwhile. Because of this, we'll find ourselves looking around and comparing ourselves to other people. In our society we tend to base our self-worth on four things: We judge our worth first by our appearance. Then we judge our worth by our achievement. Then we judge our worth on approval. Finally, we judge our worth on our affluence. The problem with these four standards is that none of them are stable. They will all change. Appearances change with time, affluence can change with one bad choice. And there's only one thing that won't change, and that is what God thinks about us. When we understand what God thinks of us, it changes the way we see ourselves. A close look at all our readings today reveals one common phenomenon. This is the feeling and expression of unworthiness by all the personalities (Isaiah, Paul and Peter). Truly speaking and given fact that they are humans beings, they were not worthy for God's mission. These feelings and expressions of unworthiness were marks of humility on Isaiah who said: "I am a man of unclean lips," on Paul who admitted: "I am the least of the apostles," and on Peter who Pleaded: Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man." Whenever there is this encounter with the Divine, there is always a feeling of unworthiness on the side of the mortal. But why this feeling of unworthiness? This is because every encounter with the Divine manifests the inexhaustible grace of our magnanimous God which leads to a total transformation and empowers man with the vision for his mission. With this vision, man sees the dignity of his mission on earth and becomes aware of the transformation that has taken place in him and starts to realise that he is called to make God known to his contemporaries.

Three colleagues are walking to lunch when they find an antique oil lamp. They rub it and a Genie comes out. The Genie says, I'll give each of you just one wish. The first one says, I want to be in Mauritius without a care in the world. Poof! He is gone. The second follower says, I want to be in Hawaii, relaxing on the beach with an endless supply of drinks. Poof! He vanishes. OK, you're up, the Genie says to the third one. He says, I want those two back in the office after lunch, because I am the manager. We too, are called to witness God in the world. We may immediately reply that we are not worthy and that we are sinners. But God considers us worthy and that is all that counts. It is not Isaiah, Paul and Peter who choose God. It is the very opposite and that is what matters. God sees the marvellous potential in each of us. Some of the great saints, lived very sinful lives early on. But God then touched them and they responded. Do we not pray in the part of Eucharistic Prayer II after the consecration 'we thank you Lord for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and minister to you' If God considers us worthy who are we to object? Peter had worked hard all night and caught nothing. Jesus asked him to try again. He could have objected saying he was exhausted or that there were no fish where they had failed to catch any. However, he responded to Jesus and tried again. Look at the result. Sometimes we too may get tired of trying to be good Christians. We may get bored, disillusioned with what we sometimes see going on in the church. We may want to give up on ourselves or on others who disappoint or even betray us. But we do it anyway and it works – relationships take on new life, classes or work-places become places of inspiration, our prayer life takes off – so much so that our problem now becomes how to cope with all we have to do: our nets begin to tear. This awareness makes him feel humbled by God's grace and the individual can only confess his unworthiness for such favour. At this moment, the individual is energized by God's grace to do whatever God requires of him. Then we can say that mission has taken place and the individual begins to do his work as he has been sent. The purpose of life is to be converted to the Lord.