**FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**

**6th February 2022**

**Two etymological crumbs**

The meaning of words changes simply through daily use. Words acquire associations which must be utterly erased from our minds before we can understand the way our ancestors used them. To-day we have two examples.

Firstly, we have ‘vocation’ In the readings we learn of the vocations of Isaiah and Peter. To-day we use the English word ‘vocation’ to mean an aptitude or a suitability for a particular profession. But it rarely involves a specific summons from a source outside ourselves as it does in the New Testament.

The second word we have is ‘holiness’ This has come to be associated with piety and morality, but it was not so in the beginning. These virtues have been adopted, because they *ought* to be properties of holiness. The absurdity of this can be seen in the idea of Holy Water which has no moral rating. No! Holiness was simply ‘separation’ for a religious purpose. Water (or bread and wine or people or time) can be made holy by simply putting it to one side for a specific Christian use. Lent is thus a ‘holy’ season.

So, in Baptism, people are made holy (Greek hagios) by separation from other people, who remain stuck in the world. In the New Testament ‘hagios’ is translated ‘saint’ which was simply ‘a disciple of Jesus’ (see e.g. Ephesians 1;1) After the New Testament, around the early 2nd century, with the risk of martyrdom, ‘hagios’ began to be reserved for a Christian who had completed his journey, rather than one who was still on the road.

Interestingly, with regard to the vocations of Isaiah and Peter, neither of them had an aptitude for their work. Both were reluctant and protested but were overruled.

**First Reading Isaiah 6:1-8**

This is one of those occasions that we can confidently date because we know that Uzziah died in 740 B.C. Isaiah seems to have been an aristocrat and, apparently, a native of Jerusalem. We think that he lived sometime between 783 and 687 B.C.

The vision and call of Isaiah form one of the most vivid scenes of the Old Testament. It was probably inspired by his actual presence during worship in the temple. Isaiah describes his vision of Yahweh in heaven with imagery derived from the earthly temple at Jerusalem, where his experience takes place. The underlying conviction was that the Jerusalem temple is an earthly expression of the heavenly temple. One is led to suppose that the Sanctus and the use of incense was likewise part of the liturgy of the earthly temple, just as it in turn passed into the Christian liturgy. The vision of God's holiness leads Isaiah to confess his sense of utter unworthiness. His call thus comes to him as a sheer miracle of grace. The prophet first receives forgiveness for his sin, is then called to "go for us," and eventually responds by accepting the call.

The primary emphasis today, however, is not on the vision itself but on the vocation, which parallels that of Peter in today's gospel. Note the contrast between his initial diffidence in reaction to the vision and the confidence with which Isaiah finally accepts the call.

**Responsorial Psalm: 137:1-5, & 7-8**

This is a psalm of praise and thanksgiving, following appropriately upon Isaiah's vision. It should be noted that whereas the combination of the Old Testament reading and the gospel highlights the call, the psalm highlights Isaiah's vision, as indicated by the refrain and the third line of the first stanza.

**Second Reading 1 Corinthians 15:1-I1**

To my mind, this is one of the strongest pieces of evidence for Jesus’ resurrection which can be found in the New Testament.

The estimate for the date of the writing of 1 Corinthians is soon after 47-48 A.D. or about 15 years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and well before the Gospel accounts. As is clear from the 500 witnesses, many were still alive, Paul could not have been so explicit if his claims could be ridiculed.

He starts by appealing to the resurrection of Jesus and quotes an early creed. The syntax suggests early liturgical use. *'I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve' (vv. 3-5)*. The words 'he was buried' underlines the finality of Jesus' death.

Since he mentions Cephas (Peter) and James (the brother of the Lord) by name, and since he met these two men at Jerusalem on his first post-conversion visit there about the year 35 A.D. a substantial part of these formulas must be very ancient, taking us back to less than five years or so of the events alluded to.

Significantly, he makes no distinction between the appearance to himself and the appearances to the other witnesses. Therefore it is evident that the resurrection appearances did not come to an end with the ‘Ascension’

And it also means that conviction of Jesus’ ‘presence’ does not depend on an optical ‘sighting’ In none of the three accounts in Acts, of the Damascus-road episode (9:1-19; 22:5-16; and 26:10-18) is it stated that Paul actually saw the Lord. A great light ('brighter than the sun') shone round him and a voice spoke to him. Yet, he was absolutely convinced that it was indeed the Lord.

Paul uses the word óphthé to state that Christ appeared to Cephas, to James, the other witnesses listed, and to himself. The word can be rendered 'he showed himself.' It means that the risen Jesus made his presence felt in such a fashion that Paul can say, 'I have seen the Lord.' What is involved is a divine initiative leading to a real experience of the presence of the Lord and a firm conviction of the reality of his presence.

**Gospel Luke 5:1-11**

Mark puts the call of the first disciples at the very beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. (Mark 1:16-20) This is understandable if he was looking back at a dramatic change in his life-story, but it is also unlikely that one would throw in one’s lot with a complete stranger. It must be remembered that Mark only came to know the Apostles later. Luke has left the event until now.

The passage is composite and we may distinguish three elements: a detailed setting for Jesus’ teaching (vv. 1-3); a miraculous catch of fish (vv. 4-10); the call of Simon (vv. 10-11).

This miracle story is a close version of that related in John 21:1-1 1 - which suggests that it originally may have been a resurrection story. A clue which suggests this may be found in the name 'Simon Peter', here only found in Luke, but also found in John. If so, the story is here reused by Luke to provide the scene for a symbolic change from the old life of catching fish to the new one of catching people.

'Lake of Gennesareth' (v. 1) is Luke's more traditional designation of the popularly named 'Sea of Galilee'.

Throughout Luke the 'lake' is more important for theological themes than geographical ones: it is the place of manifestations which demonstrate the power of Jesus (see 8:22-25). Simon's words (v. 5) underline the miraculous nature of the subsequent catch: since the night, the best time for fishing, has yielded nothing, this daytime attempt is, humanly speaking, doomed to failure.

Peter, profoundly moved by the miracle, sinks to his knees and spontaneously declares his unworthiness. Notice, that before the catch, Peter addressed

Jesus as Master, (epistata) but afterwards as Lord, (kurios) the distinctive title that no Christian would use of anybody else, even at the price of martyrdom. This is retrospectively the moment of Peter’s conversion.

James and John too are overcome by awe and Jesus speaks the reassuring words: 'Do not be afraid' (see also Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10).

The symbolism of the miraculous catch is now made clear: henceforth Peter will be a fisher of people; already he stands forth as the leader. The implied call is, however, not addressed to him alone; others too are to follow Jesus (v. 11). Luke, typically, specifies that they left 'all' (see 5:28; 11:41; etc.).

At the beginning we looked at the idea of vocation. I would suggest that there are two kinds of vocation, specific and general. A specific is one which is personal and unique. Only the one called can fulfil it. We would probably give Paul as an example of this for his pioneering theology and work among the early churches.

Much more frequent would be a general vocation such as the service supplied by Simon of Cyrene (Luke 23;26) when he helped with Jesus’ cross-beam. Anyone could have helped equally well, but Simon happened to be on the spot.

Now the role of a Priest or Religious is commonly reckoned to be of the first type but I would put it second. There are many people to-day who would make good priests or religious and fulfil a real need. We should not fall into the trap of thinking that vocations are exotic, or rare. We should not sit waiting for a disembodied voice in the night time but use our own initiative to see what is needed. Everybody has a vocation of some sort, and the sign of the most important vocation of all is of course Baptism, when one is called out of the world to follow Christ.