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Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois  
4 February 2007

The Fifth Sunday of the Year (C)

Today the Psalmist sings, and we sing with him: "When I called, you answered me" (Psalm 138:3). I wonder, though, can Christ Jesus say to us: "When I called, you answered me"?

Simon Peter, James and John "left everything and followed [Jesus]" because he called them. Jesus walks by and simply - without asking - hops into Peter's boat and Peter would never be the same again. "Jesus, who was a carpenter, was not a fishing expert and, yet, Simon the fisherman trusted this Rabbi, who gave him no answers but called on him to have faith."<sup>1</sup> Isn't that how it always is with Jesus? He does not tell us where we are going; he does not tell us what we will be doing; he simply says, "Do not be afraid! Come, follow me!"

Love calls out to Peter and he rightly responds, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). As the Light of the World stands before him, Peter sees the darkness of his own sin. He is overcome with shame and he knows that he is not worthy to stand in the presence of the Lord. Peter's response is, really, the same as that of Isaiah. Isaiah, too, stands in the presence of the Lord God and recognizes his own sinfulness. Isaiah says, "Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience Address, 17 May 2006.

lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).

We know, if we are honest, that we - like Isaiah and Peter - are sinners and that none of us deserves to stand before the One who is sinless. Yet, sinners though we are, the Lord does not reject us, nor he does not turn us away.

There are times in our lives when we feel the burden of our sin and we feel completely unworthy of the Lord. There are times that we cannot lift our eyes to meet his, when we cannot see the Lord gazing lovingly down upon us from the Cross. If the weight of your sinfulness crushes you, what are you waiting for? The Lord is waiting for you. Go to confession! The Lord wants to forgive you, but you must come to him. In these times we would do well to follow the example of Peter, to repent and to follow the One who gives us no answers but calls us simply to have faith in him. He wants to forgive us and he wants to say to us: "Do not be afraid!"

Today, we frequently hear of a "vocations shortage," but I tell you, there is no shortage of vocations. There is, rather, a shortage of those willing to hear the call of the Lord and to follow the example of the Apostles. There is, also, a shortage of those who are willing to encourage others to follow where the Lord leads. I am confident that within this very parish the

Lord is calling many young people to follow after him in the priestly or religious life.

Vocations only rarely fall out of heaven, as it were. More often than not, they arise within families and are encouraged and supported within them. We need families who are willing to cooperate with the Lord Jesus to water those seeds who are to become the fishers of men.

Too often parents ask their children, "What do you want to be when you grow up? What do you want to do with your life?" This is a flawed question and it is the wrong question. The right question is this: "What does God want you to do with your life?" It is not about us; it is about God.

To all of you parents I ask this question: When was the last time you encouraged your children to pray about a religious vocation? If you have never done so, shame on you. Do not say to the Lord, "Give us vocations, but call someone else's child." Say instead, "Lord, give us vocations and call one of my children."

I know that you want only the best for your children. I know, too, that when we look around today we see so many people who have done nothing except what they have wanted to do, so many who have given their lives to sloth, lust, greed, envy, anger, gluttony. They have followed everything they thought would bring them happiness but happiness they have not found,

all because they have looked in the wrong places. Peter saw this within himself. This is why he said, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing" (Luke 5:5). It is to say: "Lord, I have looked for happiness but I have not found it." He trusts Jesus enough to say, "but at your command I will lower the nets;" that is, "I will seek happiness in your command." Peter finds what he seeks by following the will of Jesus Christ.

How, then, are we to know what God wants of us? I propose three questions to discern the will of God for us: What brings me the greatest joy? Where do I find peace? Where am I fulfilled? Where these three questions coincide there is the will of God. It is that simple. He wants us to be happy, to be at peace, and for our lives to have meaning. This is what we want, too, and all this we will find if we but follow his will.

To those of you who think the Lord might be calling you to a religious vocation, I want to offer a word of encouragement. Very often we feel the Lord tugging at the strings of our heart, calling us to himself. Our initial reaction is often one of genuine humility and unworthiness. We know that we are not always who the Lord calls us to be, that we are sinners. We say to him, "Lord I am not worthy of so great a gift. You cannot choose me. Choose another."

It may seem that you are the only one considering a vocation and that you are the only one who will understand. You may feel ashamed to tell someone, but there is nothing to be ashamed of. If those you tell mock you or laugh at you they are not worthy of your confidence. You must find someone to trust, someone who will offer you genuine counsel and help you to discern the Lord's will, not your own and not some else's.

I tell you: the Lord knows what he is doing. Trust him. Listen to him. Follow where he leads. He will never lead you astray; he will never ask of you what you cannot do with his grace; he will never call you to do what will not bring you happiness, peace and fulfillment. Trust him. Leave everything behind and follow the Master, for in him alone will your heart be at rest. Do not be afraid!

I who stand before you now in the person of Christ say in his name: Come, follow me, and you will find life, happiness and peace. Do not be afraid! Christ is calling. What will you tell him?