

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 5TH SUNDAY -C-
Isaiah 6: 1-2a, 3-8 Psalm 138 I Corinthians 15: 1-11 Luke 5: 1-11
By Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Just a reminder— for those of you who preach at or attend daily Mass. We have reflections on the lectionary readings on our webpage: <https://PreacherExchange.com> Go to: “Daily Reflections”.

“I didn’t know what I was getting myself into!” I have heard people, including myself, exclaim that many times. They may be referring to the decision they made with their spouse to have children. There are wonderful moments parents have with their children, but over the years, the long haul, parenting requires love, patience, perseverance and a large dose of hope. I am sure every parent has said, probably more than once, “I didn’t know what I was getting myself into!” I know a man who said the same thing. He decided to add a room to his house and did the work himself. Halfway through he felt he was in over his head and wondered what he had gotten himself into. Those of us who have gone on to college or graduate school inevitably feel that way, usually when we are racing to finish a term paper or cramming for an exam. What did we get ourselves into?

I wonder if Peter and his companions, at some time further down the road and after watching and listening to Jesus, wondered, “What have we gotten ourselves into?”—especially when Jesus began speaking about going to Jerusalem to die—most especially when he said they must be willing to deny self, pick up their cross and follow him. But all that comes much later in the story. That’s not where we are in the gospel narrative today. We are still at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry when he has begun calling his disciples.

It begins simply enough; but there are already suggestions in today’s gospel that Peter and his companions are going to get very involved and much will be asked of them in their relationships with Christ---further on down the road. It all starts when Jesus gets into Simon’s boat and asks him to, “put out a short distance from the shore.” Then Jesus teaches the crowds from Simon’s boat. But a teaching has begun for Simon. Since Jesus is in his boat, we can presume he heard Jesus’ words. And that might be why he was willing to follow a carpenter’s advice about fishing, “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.”

It’s one step at a time; not a sudden lunge into full-blown discipleship. First it’s a “short distance” from the shore. Then Simon will go into “deep water.” Out there his own resources

and skill will be inadequate. He has come up empty in his attempts to catch fish. But listening to the word from Jesus and responding to it will make all the difference in deep waters. (Did you notice how Luke first calls him Simon and then, when he sees the enormous catch of fish, his name shifts to Simon Peter? It's as if he is already changing into the disciple—not completely, but little by little?)

How many people have we known, ourselves included, who have decided to “do a little something” or “give something back” by helping others? After a while, they find themselves deeply immersed in their good works—working hard, sometimes feeling drained, but loving it nevertheless. Someone decided to teach a religion class to teenagers; a few years later they are taking them on retreats or spending vacation time with them to help repair homes in rural Mexico. A college student joins friends to deliver a box of food to a needy family at Christmas, is moved enough by the experience to become part of the campus ministry's outreach program. A business man gives his just-purchased lunch to a homeless person near his office and then, before long, he and his family are making 50 sandwiches a night to be dropped off at a shelter on his way to work.

We have heard an invitation to “put out a short distance” and if we keep listening—at our liturgies, in prayer, during the very act of serving others— we hear a further call to, “put out into deep water.” When we hear that voice and respond, we become Simon's companions, whose very identity was changed from being fishers of fish to “fishers of people.” Later, to show the extent and depth of the change that was taking place in Simon, Jesus will give him a new name—Peter. As Luke tells us at the end of today's episode, following Jesus requires leaving everything and receiving a new identity. We become, step by step, hearers and then responders to God's Word.

For the first time in this gospel, Luke uses the expression, “the word of God.” People, he says, are pressing forward to hear “the word of God.” (What preacher wouldn't like that said of him or her!?) Also, for the first time, Jesus is addressed as “Master.” Peter introduces the term of address here; throughout the gospel only the disciples will call him “Master.” In today's account they not only hear the word from Jesus, their Master, they also decide to respond to it by following Jesus' command. Because of that, their efforts are rewarded. How does divine power for their task occur?by their hearing and responding to the Word of God.

Any of us who have followed Jesus' invitation to “put out to deep water,” know how demanding the work can be and how much is needed to be faithful and persevering, especially when the results of our toil are not immediately evident. We don't often get to see the nets full and overflowing.

What's more, all disciples, like Simon, feel at one time or another, a sense of unworthiness. We, like Isaiah, can say we are a people of "unclean lips." In today's gospel Luke is underlining the Word of God as the origin and sustaining power for our role as disciples. We are on the road with Jesus, trying to live by his word and respond to his call—especially when serving him has taken us into deep waters and we ask, "How did I get myself into this?"

These past two Sundays have emphasized God's call and our response. Last week we heard about Jeremiah's call and Jesus' announcement in the synagogue of his own vocation. Today Isaiah finds himself in God's presence, feels unworthy, is cleansed, purified and then he is ready to respond to God's call. Peter responds similarly when he senses the special presence and power before him. He too feels unworthy. But, as with Isaiah, the holy One does the calling and, despite feelings of unworthiness, the human is invited to respond and follow. The issue isn't whether we think we are worthy or not to serve God. The issue is that God chooses us and finds ways to grace us with worthiness—and forgiveness, when we realize again and again, we are people of "unclean lips." Jesus isn't just asking Simon Peter to make an act of faith in him and then go home and pray. Faith in Jesus does require that—and more. His followers must also go out into the world and catch people for him. By our words and deeds, we must share with others the faith we have received.

Simon Peter received his call while he was doing his work. He said, "Yes," and responded by changing his life. Every day, in the midst of our routine, at work, home, school or play, there are opportunities to respond to Jesus' call to follow him. In innumerable ways our Christian vocation must guide what we say and how we act. In big decisions and small, we are asked to live what we profess as Jesus' followers; to be attentive to what God may be asking of us at this moment of our lives. This may entail being faithful to the commitments we already have; responding to a need we see or taking the opportunity to witness to what we believe. Of course, such responses may seem small and insignificant. They may be small, but they are never insignificant! In addition, who knows where the next "Yes" we say to Christ may lead us? We might go places we never expected; say things to people we never thought we would—all because of Christ. We even might get to a place where we ask ourselves, in wonder and amazement, "I didn't know what I was getting myself into!...but it is very good!" Wherever and however, we find ourselves serving the One Peter and we call, "Lord," our faith assures us disciples he will be there with his presence and reassurance, "Do not be afraid...."

ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER

THE TREASURE OF GUADALUPE, edited by Virgilio Elizondo, Allan Gigueroa Deck and Timothy Matovina. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc. 2006.) Paper, 134 pages. ISBN 978-0-7425-4857-2.

Noted preachers, pastoral leaders and thinkers share with us homilies and meditations on the rich Guadalupan tradition. People from various ethnic backgrounds will find these reflections helpful. They are not meant for direct use, but as resources to inspire, preachers, catechists, teachers and others in a tradition that has nourished so many of our Mexican brothers and sisters who have brought their faith into our midst. The treasure that awaits us in this book is to discover an authentic Christian faith that is rooted in the soil of the Americas.

QUOTABLE

...I believe that we Lutherans can celebrate Mary of Guadalupe because, like Mary herself in her great New Testament hymn of God's praise, the Magnificat, she proclaims to us the gospel, the Good News of our salvation in Christ, the Good News of God who scatters the proud, exalts the lowly, fills the hungry with good things and remembers [God's] promises to Abraham and his children forever.

—Maxwell E. Johnson, in THE TREASURE OF GUADALUPE, page 89.

JUSTICE NOTES

*"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"
"Here I am," I said; "send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)*

The Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The month of February is dedicated by our nation to remembering and celebrating the contributions of black Americans to U.S. history. Foremost among these many contributors is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who led this nation in a radical conversion of heart, to acknowledge the sin of racism, and to begin the long and arduous journey of correcting centuries of injustice for black Americans.

Like Jesus, Dr. King was killed because he made the powerful uncomfortable. Some believe that Dr. King would be dismayed at being honored as a national hero on a pedestal, because it focuses us on his past achievements instead of on the future and the great work he was still pursuing.

Dr. King did not rest with the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. He frightened some of his own followers and alienated some of his supporters when he also spoke out fearlessly for peace and against the U.S. war in Vietnam:

“Never again will I be silent on an issue that is destroying the soul of our nation and destroying thousands and thousands of little children in Vietnam.... The time has come for a real prophecy, and I am willing to go that road.”

At the end of his life, he was working tirelessly to improve the lot of all poor people in the “Poor People’s Campaign”. He was organizing a massive march to Washington and planned to camp out there with thousands until the nation changed its priorities from militarism to justice for its citizens:

“I am tired of hearing the work of poor people described as menial labor. What makes a job menial is that we don’t pay folk anything. Give somebody a job and pay them some money so they can live and educate their children and buy a home and have the basic necessities of life.

As we celebrate the memory and achievements of Dr. King, let us do so by rededicating ourselves to the goals for which he lived and died: Peace, Justice for all, especially for the poor, and Love for everyone, even our enemies. They are also those for which Jesus lived, died and rose again.

“Let us move on in these powerful days, to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, NC)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

"It is time to abandon the death penalty -- not just because of what it does to those who are executed, but because of how it diminishes all of us... We ask all Catholics--pastors, catechists, educators and parishioners -- to join us in rethinking this difficult issue and committing ourselves to pursuing justice without vengeance. With our Holy Father, we seek to build a society so committed to human life that it will not sanction the killing of any human person.

-----("Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," U.S. Catholic Bishops, Nov. 2000,)

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty."

Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to:.....

- Richard Cagle #0061529 (On death row since 6/16/95)
- William Morganherring #0180479 (7/22/95)
- Leslie Warren #0487180 (10/6/95)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: "FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR C" This compilation, from past "First Impressions," includes two reflections on almost all Sundays and major feasts for all liturgical years. For more information and to purchase go to: <http://PreacherExchange.com>

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional

thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (FrJude@JudeOP.org)

3. Our webpage address: <https://preacherexchange.com> where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes "First Impressions" and “Homilías Dominicales,” as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

4. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please go to our webpage to make a Secure online donation: <https://PreacherExchange.com/donations.htm>

Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

Jude Siciliano, O.P., FrJude@JudeOP.org

Promoter of Preaching,

Southern Dominican Province, USA