

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time  
Feb. 6 & 7, 2016

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How many of you remember what Pope Francis said when he first greeted the people after his election? He said: "I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon."

He recognized that he is in need of God's forgiveness and he obviously strongly believes in that forgiveness or he could not write all that he does on God's mercy. So he knows himself as an ordinary sinner that was called forth by God.

Isaiah, in today's first reading recognized himself as a sinner. He is in need of God's forgiveness. Then, he believed in that forgiveness, he was free to answer God's call, he took up the challenge with his response: "Here I am, send me."

Paul, too, sinner that he was, ends up traveling the entire known world, suffering untold hardships, and imprisonment, giving everything he had.

Jesus does not put distance a between himself and sinners. Jesus comes to the lost, travels into people's lives, into their homes, meets their families, eats at their table, listens to their stories, and calls them to a new way of life.

Jesus is at it again, calling others to follow God's way. Imagine this carpenter entering into the lives of these career fishermen. What does a carpenter know about fishing? You net fish at night when the fish come to the surface! This carpenter turns and tells Peter James and John to put out, no matter that they've been all night at it. So out they go and to their shock, the nets which Jesus instructed them to throw, are filled to the brim. Now Peter is overwhelmed and says: leave me, get away from me. It's dangerous to be too near God. You could lose your life, but win a new one. We live under that same risk when we live with Christ.

Who wants to be touched? Who wants to be sent? Jesus says don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to put out your net to someone here in our community who needs you. Don't be afraid to call or write a senator. Don't be afraid to help a neighbor,

join a task force, be a mentor. Jesus calls out the worth in each of us and challenges us to be fishers of people for the sake of the Kingdom.

We are all called, as Vatican II documents stated. We are all sent into the world to be disciples of mercy.

NCR columnist, Patricia Sanchez, quotes Sadhu Singh, an internationally known Sikh who converted to Christianity. Everywhere Sadhu Singh went, he would tell this story:

There was a man whose son enjoyed spending time in his father's garden. The son watched as birds came and ate the fruit. Cattle trampled the plants. The son saw, but did nothing. Passersby asked, "Is it right for you to see your father's garden destroyed in this way and do nothing?" "My father has not asked me to do so," said the son, "So that is not my work." In one form or another; the son's attitude is often reflected in our attitude. "It's not my job. Send someone else. I have enough to do."

Many great and small invitations are given to us by God every day. God gives us everything we need to respond to those invitations. When I was very young I used to go fishing with my father. One time we went out very early morning, like at 5 am. We sat for one hour and caught nothing. Then, all of a sudden we couldn't get the fish off our hooks and back in the water quick enough. We were sitting over a school of fresh water pike, big ones! Each of us is here sitting above the surface of all kinds of good things. Psychologists have said that the fish is a symbol of what is swimming around in our inner depth: possibilities, talents, riches, expectations, potentialities, creativities...hidden from our eyes because they are swimming in the dark—silent, mysterious, unseen. Fish those possibilities up from within ourselves and help others to that realization.

The fish symbol on the back of a car refers to the Greek word "ICTHUS," which spells out an acronym for the words: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. From now on, when you see one, let it remind you that you are called. You are not written off because you are a sinner. God sees your worth and you are sent to bring the Good News of mercy.