

**OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE 5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
7TH FEBRUARY 2010**

In all three of our readings we hear about profound religious experiences.

Isaiah tries to describe the experience of God which made him a prophet. He has a direct experience of God. The experience is so powerful and unique that he has to use special language to describe it. He feels a strange combination of fear and attraction.

St. Paul had a similar experience on the road to Damascus. He, too, describes this peculiar feeling of fear and attraction. This makes him feel like the least of the apostles.

Simon Peter had a similar experience in the gospel when, against all the odds, Jesus enables him to make an amazing catch of fish. Simon Peter feels himself to be in the presence of an awesome power, but he trusts Jesus enough to follow him for the rest of his life.

They all experienced God as both fearful and attractive.

The response of all three is similar. They all feel profoundly unworthy to be in the presence of such a God.

Isaiah says: "What a wretched state I am in. I am lost." He is lost without the mercy and support of God.

Paul says: "I hardly deserve the name apostle."

Simon Peter says: "Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man."

God's response to their sense of unworthiness is very important.

God made Isaiah one of the greatest prophets, Paul one of the greatest apostles, and Simon Peter the leader of the Church. In each case God forgave them their sin, made their sense of unworthiness unimportant, and then filled them with his own power to bring other people to a knowledge and understanding of God. It looks as if God can communicate best through people who have experienced fear and love in his presence and admit their own unworthiness and dependence on him.

This raises some practical points.

Firstly, sin, confession, reconciliation.

Some people struggle with the sacrament for many reasons.

Isaiah, Paul and Simon Peter would not have struggled with it because they had experienced their own unworthiness in the presence of God. This could be the difference between them and us. If all of us had a similar experience of God it would be much easier to say,

"What a wretched state I am in."

Or "I hardly deserve the name Christian."

Or "Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful person".

However, we have not all had a similar experience of God. Although such experiences occur quite regularly to a number of people they do not happen for everyone. It is hard to understand why not.

It could be that those who are faithful without having had a direct religious experience may be developing a deeper faith. As Jesus said to Thomas: "Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe." One of last year's confirmation candidates made a profound statement of faith. When asked about her belief in the Holy Spirit she replied simply, "It will come."

It could be that some people are not prepared for a direct experience of God. They may even block it because it is disturbing. We must pray to be open to the action of God in our lives.

Another reason could be that some of us do not need a direct experience of God to fulfil our lives on earth.

The idea that God grants direct experiences to some and not others suggests that he is rewarding some and punishing others. This is not necessarily so.

What if we think of God as calling us all to be his prophets and apostles? God gives us all an experience of life in which he is present and active. Everyone's experience of life is slightly different, so everyone has an understanding of God unique to him/herself. Each of us has one piece of the jigsaw that makes a complete picture of God.

Thomas Merton thought of God as a great sea of Love which flows through all baptised Christians and our contemplation of God would be incomplete if it were not shared

If this is so then we all have a vocation to look after our little bit of understanding and to use it at the right time and the right place to fill a gap in the world's knowledge and understanding of God.

Let us pray that we will let the grace of God work through us in our thinking and our prayer, and, above all, to share our experience of God's power in our lives with other people at the right time and in the right place.

Rev Geoff Carey