

February 10, 2019
 Fifth Sunday of the Year
 Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

“The Encounter that changes everything”

Soon after becoming Pope, Benedict XVI wrote his first Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, (God is Love). In the opening article, the then Pope summarized in one sentence what it means to be Christians.

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.

Here Benedict, who is one of the greatest theologians of our era and one the most astute ethicists, wants us to know that Christianity is not first and foremost about theology and ethics, although these are vitally important. Rather Christianity is primarily about a living encounter with the Lord. It is the most important encounter of our lives that changes everything. It is this encounter that will give us a new horizon, what we call theology, and a new direction, what we call ethics. But the order of these really matters. It is in response to Jesus Christ and our encounter with him that we can think clearly about God, which is theology and can then think clearly about how we are to live with one another, which is ethics.

In today’s Epistle that apostle Paul keeps this same order before us, when in verses 1 and 2 he tells us:

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved,

Here Paul too is referring to the encounter that changes everything. He speaks of this encounter in three ways.

It is the Gospel which you received. This means that it is God who takes the initiative in establishing this relationship. What Benedict refers to as “the event and encounter with a person, the Lord Jesus Christ.” But it is also the Gospel in which we stand, and from this perspective have the new horizon, that allows us to understand God, this is theology. Then thirdly Paul says this is the Gospel by which we are saved. This is the “decisive direction” Benedict refers to, which is ethics, and helps to govern how we live in relationship with one another.

Today’s first reading locates the Prophet Isaiah in the Jerusalem Temple where he is caught up in worship. It is while Isaiah is in adoration of God that he hears the praise of angels:

***Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
 the whole earth is full of his glory.***

Such angelic voices joined by the twenty-four elders are singing the same hymn with a slight variation in Revelation 4. There St John hears exclaimed:

***Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!***

Here is expressed the heart of how we encounter God. Isaiah hears words that point to God's general revelation, as evidenced in the natural world. "The whole earth is filled with his glory." St John hears very similar words, except now the attribute of God's character is expressed in relation to his eternal character, the one who was and is and is to come. When we see this connection between general revelation, "the whole earth is full of his glory" and particular revelation, "who was and is and is to come" then with Benedict and St Paul we will know this personal encounter that does indeed change everything. Listen to how Isaiah puts it.

Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"¹

And then hear the similar expression in Paul:

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.²

It is an encounter leading our first Pope and patron St. Peter to honestly see himself rightly in relation to Jesus.

Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!³

Today's declare to us God meets us so that we can receive something of his holiness. Such change and transformation can be painful, like hot incense coals touching the lips of Isaiah, like St Paul being thrown to the ground, unable to see, like Peter's growing realization that he is not self-sufficient enough, be it as a fisherman or an apostle.

Such an encounter shapes how we think about God, theology and how we live with one another, ethics as we hear Jesus say to us: "Go out into the deep". There is a world out there that needs to be brought into the Peter's boat, the Church. There is a world out there that is confused about their theology, not knowing who God is, and confused about their ethics and therefore live disordered and unethical lives.

Jesus says to us, "you are the ones who are to be catching the world for me and not you being caught by the world.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 6:5). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (1 Co 15:8-9). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Lk 5:8). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

As he did 2000 years ago when on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and called the first apostles to follow him, he is doing the same today. Because of our baptism all of us are called to share in the vocation of going out into the deep and fishing for people. But there is a call he may be directing towards you to the vocation of the religious life or priesthood so you can give your total yes to Jesus and say:

“Here I am Lord, send me. I know I don’t have what it takes to serve you in this way. But look what you did with a man at worship in the Jerusalem Temple, a Man who was persecuting the Church and one who heart was big but at first his courage small. Jesus you used Isaiah, Paul and Peter, could it be that you are calling me to the religious life or priesthood”.

If you think this may be so and you are under 18, talk about this with your parents and make an appointment to come and see me with them so we can talk and pray together. If you are over 18, also talk about this with your parents and if you are so led, send me an email. I would be pleased to sit and talk with you about discerning such a call.

At the beginning of today’s Mass, we prayed: “Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care”, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defend always by your protection”.

Jesus answers this prayer in a most special way through the ordained ministers of the Church – his Pope, Bishops, priests and deacons, who extend that unfailing care by extending the pastoral ministry of Jesus. The religious embody by their lives the meaning of total reliance on God’s heavenly grace, so that by their prayers we may know the Lord’s protecting love.

Isaiah, Paul and Peter we pray with you that there will be those here at St. Peter’s who in their encounter with Jesus hear His question:

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

And will respond:

“Here am I; send me!”⁴

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 6:8). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.