

## Reflection on the Sunday Readings

# FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

### Call

Our language embodies the confusion we experience in the face of transcendence. For example, the word “terrific” connotes fright, terror. But a terrific experience is also attractive to us. So, our response is simultaneous attraction and repulsion. We have all had some kind of terrific experience that has drawn us near and made us afraid. Those experiences that are somehow beyond us give us some idea of what it is like to be summoned toward transcendence.

*FIRST READING: Isaiah 6:1–2a, 3–8    RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 138:1–2, 2–3, 4–5, 7–8*  
*SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 [3–8, 11]    GOSPEL: Luke 5:1–11*

### Comment

The magnificent Temple paled in comparison to Isaiah’s vision of God, who appears in the brightness of angels. The experience left Isaiah purged and strengthened, once he recovered his composure. In his vision he understood himself called near. But he also felt unworthy to draw near, much less be addressed by God’s angels. But called he was. And Isaiah was finally able to respond in a firm and loud voice, “Here I am, send me!” It would be hard to imagine a more dramatic calling. One wonders how Isaiah managed to survive to tell the story. One expects him to be somehow singed or dazed. He is transformed, for sure!

Jesus’ call to Peter is less spectacular but no less important. Jesus turned toward Peter on his turf—well, water, actually. In any case, the setting was the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the place Peter knew best—the lake where he plied his trade. The detailed, carefully written account signals its importance to Peter and to us. This is the beginning of Jesus’ mission, his assembling of his closest friends. It is morning and the fishermen are washing their nets. The long night of toil is over. It was a hard night, and they had caught no fish. Jesus needs room along the shore, the people crowd so close. After preaching from Peter’s boat a little off shore, Jesus asks Peter to cast his net, presumably to catch fish—why else?

### Reflection

Well, Peter knew fish, but Jesus knew his mission. The marvelous catch of fish brought everything into focus for Peter, who had already spent some time with Jesus and had witnessed other miracles. But now he saw anew. He fell to his knees, suddenly aware of who Jesus was and who he was—or was not. Who Peter was and what he lacked did not matter. Who Jesus was and what he asked mattered absolutely. Peter knew this, and he knew that this was it. Along with his fishing partners, James and John, Peter left his boats and his fishing and followed Jesus.

Today we hear from one last apostle, who was as surprised as anyone could be about his calling—Paul. He does not set forth the story of his calling but rather the mission for which he was called. We have in today’s second reading the Church’s oldest surviving faith statement. Paul sets out the hard-won and fiercely proclaimed credo that formed the heart of the Church and claimed the hearts of its members.

These stories of the beginnings of a new life for Isaiah, for Simon and his shipmates, and for Paul, all witness to an undeniable sense of the mystery of God and of each individual’s sense of inadequacy. But above all, these stories communicate God’s abiding grace, which makes their new life and mission possible.

## Reflection on the Weekday Readings

### MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8

FEAST OF JEROME EMILIANI, PRIEST, RELIGIOUS FOUNDER

#### New directions amid life's twists and turns

There are a number of saints like Jerome Emiliani, men who had been mercenary soldiers and in some cases lived hard lives, gambling, drinking, and brawling. Some even landed in prison. But they later underwent profound conversions that redirected them to lives of service. Emiliani, for example, ran away from home when he was 15 and became a soldier in Venice in 1506, only to be captured by the enemy. Praying for deliverance to the Virgin Mary, he got away, hung his chains on a church wall as an offering, and began studying for the priesthood. During an outbreak of spotted fever he cared for the sick and orphans in his own home. He later founded orphanages, a hospital, and a religious order. Jerome turned out right after making some wrong turns. Remember that God makes it possible for you and the people around you to be more than your pasts and always to find new paths.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13; Mark 6:53-56*

*"Wherever he went . . . they laid the sick in the marketplaces . . . and all who touched it were healed."*

### TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9

#### Are your lips sealed?

The 19th-century *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* defined "lip service" as "verbal devotion; honoring with the lips while the heart takes no part nor lot in the matter." This definition holds up pretty well today, as it did in biblical times. Technology may progress and develop, but human nature is much more stubborn. The next time you find yourself worshipping, whether in a pew, a prayer group, or in your own home, reflect on whether what is on your lips is also in your heart. If not, pray for a renewed heart!

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30; Mark 7:1-13*

*"This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."*

### WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10

FEAST OF SCHOLASTICA, VIRGIN

#### Ask and you will receive

Little is known of Saint Scholastica's life beyond the fact that she was the twin sister of Saint Benedict, the founder of Western monasticism. She and her brother were accustomed to meeting once a year to talk and pray. On what Scholastica sensed would be their last evening together, she asked Benedict to stay with her until morning. He refused, citing his rule that a monk may not be away from the monastery overnight. Scholastica then bowed her head in prayer and almost immediately a severe thunderstorm broke out, making it impossible for Benedict to leave. God loves to be asked to help. Rather than stewing in resentment or worry, remember Scholastica and ask God to help you with God's wonderfully creative solutions to trouble and conflict.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 10:1-10; Mark 7:14-23*

*"Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you."*

### THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES; WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE SICK

#### Everyday miracles

Today, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, is also the World Day of Prayer for the Sick, a reminder that Jesus' reputation was largely as a healer. The sick of Jesus' day were often assumed to be on God's wrong side and as such were often excluded from society. Healing was rare. While medicine is now a science able to help countless people recover from illness, it is still true that a caring, human touch can also have a healing effect. Lourdes perhaps more than any other Marian shrine is associated with the miracle of healing. Today I can perform the miracle of breaking the barrier of isolation that makes illness even harder to bear.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 11:4-13; Mark 7:24-30*

*"A woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet."*

### FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12

#### Listen up, speak up

Jesus performed many miracles but never did so by force. Neither would he coerce anyone to listen to him, much less to speak up on his behalf. If we choose to ignore the Good News in our own lives, we have the free will to do so. It does us well to be on guard, therefore, so that we do not fall into a sort of spiritual deafness and muteness in which we neither listen to nor speak of our faith. God would never force you to do so—faith is freely given and freely exercised. Exercise yours today.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 11:29-32; 12:19; Mark 7:31-37*

*"He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."*

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**Readings for next Sunday's Liturgy: February 14:** Jeremiah 17:5-8; Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4, 6; 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20; Luke 6:17, 20-26.