

TRADITION
(2/7/07) TOPIC OF DISCUSSION
PRESENTED BY: Fr. Ed Jocson

Opening prayer.

Last Sunday's 1st reading [Isaiah Ch 6:1-8](#) describes the call of the prophet Isaiah and is an example of how prophets were chosen by God. He first reveals Himself and the natural response of the one "Called" is an overwhelming feeling of unworthiness as inadequacies and weaknesses loom. Remember, the call comes from God as He first manifests Himself. Without His first revealing Himself there is no way of knowing Him who is so Other. Isaiah responds with "Woe is me I am doomed for I am a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." In the majestic presence of God we realize how small and insignificant we are.

We witness the same dynamic in the call of Peter ([Luke 5:1-11](#).) "But I have seen the Lord of hosts," and "Lord I am not worthy." Jesus reveals himself then Peter recognizes how unworthy he is. The narrative of the call of Peter is placed in different parts of the four Gospels. Most of them have it occurring after the resurrection. In Luke's gospel it occurs after Jesus cures Peter's mother in law and preaches from his boat. Jesus then gives the command to set out into the deep for a catch. When Peter sees this great miracle - for they are astonished at the immense catch - and realizes just who this Person is, he begs Jesus to depart because he is confronted by his own sinfulness.

Again and again throughout the scriptures, God calls first, reveals himself then brings forth the response of recognition. This is what is called the "Mystery of God" and translated from Latin it means "Terrifying but seductively attractive revelation of God Himself." God is such an Awesome Being and while we marvel at His revelation to us we are at the same time terrified. We are drawn with fear and trembling to His Greatness and Majesty. The account of God's revelation to His created human beings has been passed on to succeeding generations first in oral then in written form. This passing

down of the great Truths revealed by God is referred to as The Deposit of Faith or Sacred Tradition.

Putting this into perspective so that we can better understand it is the focus of this particular session. In our limited mental and spiritual capacity, we would not ordinarily reach out to God. However in His kindness and mercy to us, His creatures, He has chosen to give us a revelation of His true nature, first to the prophets of old then through His only son Jesus Christ who lived and moved among us as one of us. He also planted in each of us an innate desire to know Him. Our response to this desire will be explored at another session. For now, know that the response that pleases God most is our acceptance of Him in faith - a faith always tinged with a sense of awe and unworthiness.

The "called" of the Old and New Testaments would beg God to depart from them because His Holy Presence would create a sense of uneasiness as they saw themselves for what they were - sinners and therefore unworthy. Regardless of our response, God pursues us for He has a unique task for each person. He then gives us what we need to do His work. Following the miracle of the great catch, Jesus commissioned Peter with the words, "From now on you will be a fisher of men." The first apostles, when called, left everything and followed Jesus. In the case of Isaiah, the angel makes a move to cleanse him with the words "From this moment on your lips are clean." Isaiah then responds "Here I am Lord Send Me."

The incredible reality of God's first gesture is that He is the instigator and then supplier all the faith and ability that we need to respond and do His will. You may want to reflect on your own journey to this point. Through the many events in your life God has drawn you to this moment. Never doubt that His providence and grace accompany His every request of you. Anticipate with great hope and joy your personal commission by the rites you will soon experience. No matter how you perceive yourself right now never be afraid of responding to God's call on your life. In the Waters of Baptism, the Oil of Confirmation and the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist we will encounter God through the eyes of faith. This encounter will be as real as the vision of Isaiah and the personal encounters of St. Peter. He offers us a glimpse of His majesty. Here we are, His people, and Here He is our

God. Through all our intelligence and advanced faculties we cannot figure God out unless He first reveals Himself.

In the story of creation, God actually walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Our first parents were in constant communion with God and beheld the "Beatific Vision" which will be our privilege one day. After the fall, however, they were removed and lost their face-to-face intimacy with God. His back up plan was set into motion - the promise that He was going to send somebody to restore his relationship with man. He then called Noah and commissioned him to build an ark, which preserved a remnant of faithful humans during the flood. His rainbow after that event was his promise never to destroy the earth again by water. The next to be called was Abraham who He promised to make the "Father of a great nation." Moses received his call via the "Burning Bush" experience. God was distressed by the slavery imposed on His chosen people and sought to rescue them. Moses' reaction was the same as the rest "I cannot speak in public, and why me?" In spite of his initial reluctance and fear, Moses said "yes." He ended up delivering the Israelites from Egypt and led them to the Promised Land without entering it himself.

Over and over again God spoke to kings, prophets, judges, etc. to convey His message to His people. He called people from generation to generation until the fullness of revelation occurred in the manifestation of God Himself - His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus became like us in everything but sin. His apostles and disciples witnessed everything He said and did. Jesus commissioned them to preach the good news and baptize all in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The first apostles and disciples learned everything Jesus taught so that they could in turn pass on the instructions orally to those they converted. At His ascension Jesus reminded his apostles of their commission and promised them the Gift of the Holy Spirit. The task of spreading the gospel was only accomplished after the apostles received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Great courage, fortitude and wisdom was required to accomplish Jesus' commission to spread His Word to the four corners of the earth - a commission that continues until now as His church grows. Without the Grace of the Holy Spirit it is not possible for us to live lives that are pleasing to God or to do His will. The teachings of Jesus were first

communicated orally then the words began to be written down by the apostles. All revelation ended with the death of the last apostle. Through the successors of the apostles God's word - His revelation - was handed down to the present time. This is referred to as the Deposit of Faith. In this Deposit of Faith is contained everything God wants us to know to achieve salvation. The tasks of the apostles were to ensure that this revelation was passed on authentically so that we have God's unfiltered truth. In the economy of our salvation God made sure we received the authentic message.

Down through the ages, the popes and bishops have been the guardians of this Truth. Again, all public revelation ended with the death of the last apostle. Some private revelations still occur, for instance, Fatima, Lourdes etc. There have been saints and visionaries throughout history who have received message through Jesus and Mary. These are investigated thoroughly by the teaching authority of the church - the Magisterium. They are authenticated but still remain private revelations. They might highlight and reinforce already revealed truths. They do not add to or detract from what has already been revealed. While God is not limited by time and space He will not contradict Himself, so while the Church is very careful about pronouncements regarding the authenticity of visions or miracles, the fullness of revelation is Jesus Christ who was born died and rose from the dead. The Deposit of Faith handed down from the apostle's remains intact and unchanged - it is the only source of Truth.

Through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop, we have been gifted with the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults. It enables us to better understand the new Catechism of the Catholic Church because it is made relevant to us who live in the United States of America. God's perennial plan to save us knows no limits of time and space. He makes provision for us in every age because, motivated by His unconditional and indescribable love for us, it is His desire to reveal His loving plan and to draw us to Himself forever. God pursues us relentlessly. As one poet put it, He is the "Hound of Heaven." He makes the first move then he gives us what we need to fully know Him.

We certainly recognize God through his creation and through each other. There is a deep desire in every human person to seek the truth

because there is an innate awareness of our spiritual nature. Supreme good is the ultimate desire of the soul. St. Augustine says "We were made for Thee and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." Now, if this is true why are there so many people who do not know or ignore God? Impediments to seeking God or alienation from Him are sometimes the result of human pain and suffering. Many believe that if there is a God He seems not to care. Such attitudes tend to drive people away from God in a gesture of rejection and rebellion. Some in very remote corners of the earth have never been exposed to any teachings about God - they lack familiarity with the concept of a Creator God. Some are driven away because of a bad experience with a church or group of so called religious people. Then there are those who have been scandalized by people in authority. Sinful conduct weakens the ability to respond to religious instruction. It hardens the heart, weakens ones will and sense of responsibility, making one then hide from God. Yet in spite of our innate rebellious nature the deepest desire of the heart is to know God - someone other than self. Remember St. Augustine's quote "We were made for Thee and our hearts are restless unless they rest in Thee." Of course all of our worldly pursuits are merely distractions from what we truly desire, for in spite of persecution and hardship that deep yearning exists and it is because our origin is in Him and also because of the spiritual dynamism of the human heart.

Man continues to search for God in spite of violent opposition. Our curiosity of and desire to seek and know God starts with the evidence of Him in creation, then hunger for Him in our hearts and finally and most compelling, His very own revelation of Himself through the prophets of the Old Testament and then through His only Son, Jesus Christ. God is the initiator of this revelation, which is both through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. His infinite plan to save us from sin so that we can live with Him forever is prompted by His incomprehensible love for us.

This plan unfolds throughout human history, beginning in the Garden of Eden, continuing through the lives of Abraham, Moses, The Prophets and Kings and ending at the beginning, with Jesus Christ Himself who is the Alpha and the Omega - the Beginning and the End. There were physical manifestations of this reality, like the pillar of fire and clouds. There were revelations through dreams and visions,

prophecies and miraculous events that engaged the whole of Israel over many generations. God made a covenant with the people of Israel. He was to be their God and they were to be His people. Jesus took that covenant many steps forward so that the renewal of the covenant made us not just God's people but His sons and daughters – coheirs with Christ.

This revelation calls for a response from us; one of faith, repentance and conversion. Faced with the greatness of God we recognize our nothingness. Through the process of conversion, through Baptism we enter into the family of God but still await the fullness of the Kingdom when Christ will return to establish His Eternal Kingship over all the earth, when we will see Him as He is in all His Glory and Majesty. Sacred Tradition, therefore along with Sacred Scripture contains the full revelation of God. Nothing may be added or subtracted from this revelation.

Religion does not exist in a vacuum but operates in a given culture at a particular moment in time. Therefore private revelation serves only to enhance, confirm and explain these truths in a way that makes them culturally relevant and therefore more understandable. There is much in our culture that is good and favorable to faith and morality. However there are also troubling developments, which pose challenges to Christians, and other believers who are asked to respond in faith to a God who has revealed Himself. It often requires great faith and much patience and virtue to hand on gospel values to our children and other believers whose lives are negatively affected by the assaults on our Christian values.

God reveals himself in the context of the prevailing culture to a particular time and people. In our present culture there are good and bad elements. Our challenge in the midst of all of these conflicting elements is to be discerning, persevering and faithful in spite of contradictions fierce opposition, persecution and hardship. We must be single minded in our mission to evangelize our culture in a loving, compelling and convincing way. We must make the Good News of the Gospel attractive and relevant without compromising the message.

God's message is ever in season, always on the mark and full of hope for a despairing and often cynical world. Beyond the spoken word, our

actions must be in themselves a witness to the truth of our converted lives. St. Francis of Assisi said “We must preach the gospel always, if necessary use words.”

To be effective evangelizers we must be evangelized ourselves. We must immerse ourselves in the gospel message so as to exude the fragrance of His truth, and it starts with a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. We must allow Him to be fully alive in us. In Embracing the truth beauty and goodness wherever it can be found in our society, while at the same time removing falsehood and injustice from our land, we can be an answer to the prayer “Thy Kingdom Come.”

Everything we need to know about God is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ who says, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” The fullness of the Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit -resides in Jesus. There is a quote in the New Testament that says, “If everything that Jesus revealed to us were written there would not be enough room in the whole world to contain the books.” Yes, scripture is limited to what is contained in the bible so Sacred Tradition is that Deposit of Faith which safely expands on the written word. It is the handing down of the faith from the time of the apostles through the early church fathers to the present time.

This Sacred Tradition has been witnessed to by the heroic sanctity of the lives and deaths of the apostles; by the shedding of their blood as the first martyrs of the Church. The Holy Spirit guides the Church into all truth. The Church in turn is the faithful guardian of this Truth. While nothing essential is added to the content of revelation we continue even till now to deepen our understanding of that unique manifestation of God. There are two ways in which continuing conversation with God takes place; through Scripture, the written word, the Bible and through the Church’s Sacred Tradition.

There had to be a process of discernment about what comprised Sacred Scripture. A council was held and through this process the canon of Sacred Scripture was established. These books, which make up the Bible, were prayerfully determined to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. There were other books whose authenticity was in doubt and they were eliminated. The Oral Tradition, Deposit of Faith or Sacred

Tradition were then the collective teachings of the great theologians who expounded on the Sacred Scriptures and gave us a framework for the current teachings of the Church which are gleaned from both sources.

So what is Tradition? It is everything that serves to make the people of God live faith-filled lives of holiness. In this way the Church's doctrine, her life and her worship, everything she is and believes are perpetuated and transmitted to every generation. Sacred Tradition is preserved and handed on under the guidance of the bishops who are the successors of the apostles. They have the legitimate teaching authority of the Church and it is called "Apostolic Succession." Meaning they are the legitimate successors of the apostles. Catholic Christians may have opinions about certain passages of scripture or teachings of the Church humility is required to accept them as the last word.

Without the teaching authority of the Church (The Magisterium) Christ's message cannot be authentically communicated. Tradition is both the process and content of the whole life of the church. It is what inspires holiness and is all that the church is and believes. The process is made up of the teaching and the sacramental life of the church. It pertains to the worship and other traditions and is handed on to succeeding generations. The apostles who were the first receivers of Christ's message of salvation witnessed to this truth by their lives. They also preached about the call to obedience of faith that is to hear and obey God's word, to receive baptism, to form new groups of believers share in Holy Eucharist and demonstrate generosity. They also chose men to be bishops to succeed them and handed on to them what they received from Christ; His teachings and His example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit.

This is what is collectively referred to as the Magisterium, the teaching office of past popes and bishops in union with the sitting pope giving an authentic interpretation of the word of god whether in its written form or oral tradition. We depend on the Magisterium to define truth to us. In obedience we adhere to that truth.

There is also something called the Sense of the Faithful - Sensuum fideis that echoes the truth that is being taught. It is a consensus of

believe which is a gift of the Holy Spirit and confirms in us the authenticity of the truth being taught. One might say it is a gift for humble ascent to the teaching authority of the Church.

Tradition is the living transmission of the gospel. Review what was said earlier about Sacred Scripture, which is the inspired word of God who is its Author. The Holy Spirit inspired the human transmitters and it is God's word through their mouth or pen. When interpreting scripture we must be attentive to what God wanted to reveal through the authors of our salvation. First we must see scripture as a unified whole with Jesus Christ at its center. We must read Sacred Scripture within the living tradition of the whole church in order to grasp its true meaning.

Remember and recognize that there cannot be contradictions within Sacred Scripture itself. Seeming conflicts must be carefully examined and sorted out through the prism of church teaching, recognizing that the contradiction is not in the scripture but with us. We will always find our answer in the wisdom of church teaching. Our responsibility if we cannot resolve the conflict is to obediently and with faith ascent to church teaching.

Over the history of the church there have been many councils when the hierarchy of the church gathers to have discussion on faith matters. The last such council known as the Second Vatican Council was called by Pope John 23rd. A plan for pastoral renewal was one objective along with spiritual renewal of the whole church. God revealed Himself to us so that He could tell us who He is, what His plan is for our lives, and how He plans to achieve it. If we know that then all we need to do is to follow the plan laid out by Him. It is so simple but at the same time so difficult. In actuality we don't need to think any more we just follow in trust and obedience because we can never fully understand for ourselves the profundity of God's plan for our salvation. This plan involves every created being because He wills to save everybody.

The greatest impediment to cooperating with Gods plan is our own pride, disobedience, self-deception and uncooperativeness. The result is disaster because choosing God's way is really the best way for us. Our only task is to find God's will for our lives and follow it with all our

hearts. Divine providence will show us the way to achieve His plan for our lives. Obedience is a daily, moment to moment thing. Remember the will of God will never lead you to where the grace of God cannot sustain you. Make it a habit of seeking His guidance in all your decisions and allow Him the privilege of saying yes or no to your plans. The ultimate plan of God for your life may not run in a straight line because we do make mistakes. Keep on the journey with Him, though, and everything will eventually fall into place. God writes straight with the crooked lines of our lives. We may be unsure of the future but we know who holds it.