

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson  
**6th February 2022 - Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Readings (Year C): 1st: Isaiah 6:1-8. Psalm: 137. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. Gospel: Luke 5:1-11.

**The king is dead:** I remember that announcement on 6<sup>th</sup> Feb.1952, in my 7<sup>th</sup> year, no TV, just radio. Obviously I didn't know the implication; just grasped it was something serious. Nearly a year ago now, a picture of his successor the Queen in St George's chapel, Windsor, at Prince Philip's funeral all alone. But according to a close friend of hers: she doesn't feel at alone in the House of God – in fact it is perhaps where she feels most at ease. For her a place of comfort and consolation especially in the darkest moments. So it was at the opening of our 1<sup>st</sup> reading: the year of king Uzziah's death.

The Bible is a moving illustration of the faith of a people in ever changing circumstances. If we know how an oracle conveyed its message in its original setting, we then have a guide to the way it should be understood in other settings.

The year is 740 BC and the northern nation of Ashur rises up and begins its conquests. All peoples of the Middle East are afraid and try to resist; with the encouragement of Egypt, another great power. In this conflict the northern nation of Israel disappears and its capital Samaria is captured and the people deported. Northern Israel and their neighbours from Aram try to force the kingdom of Judah to join them against Ashur. Then Ahaz, son of Uzziah, the new king of Judah, calls for the help of the Assyrian armies in spite of Isaiah's warnings. The Assyrians destroy both Israel and Aram and plunder the land of Judah.

Isaiah enters the Temple in Jerusalem in the year of King Uzziah's death. He is depressed by that and what may happen in the following years. Worship is taking place: God's sovereignty is being proclaimed and re-affirmed. As the incense smoke casts a haze of semi-reality over the scene, Isaiah sees, as through a mist, the heavenly reality behind it: God seated in majesty, a God of holiness, glory and power – yet a God who has chosen to commune with a fallen world.

Isaiah feels called to take the knowledge of God to his people. The prophet is intensely aware, in the face of God's holiness, of his own utter unworthiness; he must be pardoned and renewed before he can be of service to God or humanity.

Isaiah doesn't stay around nurturing his depression; he accepts forgiveness of God when it is offered. His conviction of the reality of God's forgiveness frees him to respond to God's challenge. He is no longer preoccupied with his own unworthiness. God's forgiveness has released him for mission so that he can offer himself: "Here I am, send me."

Isaiah's mission is to speak out against moral corruption and proclaim the fall of Israel and of Judah, for the nations infidelity, and the fatal zeal of the kings of Judah to seek alliance with other nations rather than rely solely on God. Much double dealing is going on. Isaiah delivers most of his prophecies at the time of three military threats to the kingdom. Just reflect on some things happening at the present time.

What we still sing from this scene is the thrice Holy, Sanctus, of our God, and Isaiah's next chapter, 7, the sign is given of Immanuel, God with us.

In the gospel Peter and his companions are in the boat with Immanuel, God with us, Jesus. Peter along with the others realises once he has done as Jesus asks, his own unworthiness, and says leave me Lord, I'm a sinner, and they too were all overwhelmed.

Paul also in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading says the same for himself. Isaiah, Peter and Paul, recognise their inadequacy in the face of God's call, and know that it is only by God's grace they can carry out God's call and God's will. Marvellous help and teaching here for all of us.

God, Jesus, doesn't just write us off because we are sinners: he comes to help and save us. He can see beyond the sin to the worth of the sinner: hate the sin, love the sinner. That is the central message of the gospel:

Christ died for our sins.  
So fear not: launch out into the deep.

With those words Pope St John Paul II led us into the new millennium. **Duc in altum:** as we slowly recover from the pandemic: never were times more pressing to do so: at the Lord's command and with His help.

Canon Philip Dyson

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