

## Sunday 5

Did you ever ask yourself silly questions like “How high would the mountain of food which I have consumed during my life-time be?” Or “How many miles have I walked during my life-time?” Or “How many words have I spoken during my life-time?” Or “How many thoughts have I had during my life-time?” Foolish questions, in a way, but also with a little bit of reality attached to them, for we have eaten a certain amount, walked a certain distance, spoken a certain amount of words and had a certain amount of thoughts during our lives. But these questions are unanswerable, for we were not keeping count, and we cannot go back now and check these amounts.

But when we start thinking of all these thoughts and words, of all the food we have eaten and the distances we have walked, there will be certain foods and walks, certain thoughts and words which will stand out. For example, words are like clothes. Just as we have everyday clothes and special clothes, we also have everyday words and special words. “Would you hold that door for me?” we say to someone when we are carrying something. Those are everyday words. Then there are the special words like these: “I take you to be my husband or my wife. I will be true to you....”

Words like these we do not forget that we have said. They are truly special. They mark the moments of our lives which are truly memorable. They have given our lives their meaning and identity. They make us who we are. We don't forget them.

Our readings today recall such memorable words, such memorable moments, in the lives of Isaiah and Peter. Isaiah remembers being in the temple one day and being overwhelmed by an experience of the divine presence. Peter remembers the miraculous catch of fish and the realization which then came upon him that this man Jesus was no ordinary man, that in him he was meeting the divine. And when humans meet the divine, they automatically sense the difference between themselves and the divine. They become aware of their own smallness, even of their own sinfulness. "Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips. . . ," Isaiah says. And Peter cries out: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

Have we ever had such an experience? Can you remember one moment in your lives when you became vividly aware of being in the presence of the Holy? A moment of joy, unexplained joy, a moment of terrible decision, a moment of awful evil and betrayal which in a negative way revealed that we were turning our back on

the Holy? A moment of being forgiven, a moment of offering forgiveness to one who offended us? A moment of doing what was right even though it was not to our advantage and no one was looking? In such moments we can and have experienced the presence of the Holy, the Divine.

I remember a woman telling me that she took her mother-in-law, a New Englander, to see the Grand Canyon. The woman walked up to the rim of the canyon, looked, said something like “Oh, that’s nice,” and then turned and walked away. Her daughter-in-law was shocked. The Grand Canyon was nothing more than “Oh, that’s nice” to her mother-in-law.

Take time to smell the roses, we tell each other. When we don’t, we become blind to what we are seeing. We can no longer feel or hear or sense the divine in the world and people around us. We have lost our antennae for such experiences. We have the experience, but it doesn’t register with us. We remain untouched by what we have experienced.

So we have to pray that God will open our eyes and our minds and our hearts so that we can see and hear and feel Him present to us. St. Paul had it easy. The experience was so massive for him, the

light so intensive, and the voice so clear that it knocked him off his horse. Would to God that that would happen to us! But it probably won't. So we have to pray for greater sensitivity to the little ways in which God presents himself to us.

After his experience Paul was taken care of by those who were already Christian, and from them he learned who this Jesus was, for in the experience itself Jesus simply gave Paul his name and told him that in persecuting the Christians he was persecuting himself. The Christians had to teach Paul about Jesus. Today in our second reading we have the message they gave him. So here we have the basic kernel of early Christian faith. Maybe if we read it and pray over it slowly, it will become for us an experience of the Holy, of the Lord himself.

Finally, all such experiences are not enclosed in themselves. No, they are given to change us, to send us out. Let us also pray that that too may happen to us. Let us pray that having experienced the Holy, the Lord Jesus, we will want to speak about him and by our words and our actions give witness to others of how our experience of Him has changed our lives.