

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah, we see a sense of hopelessness and foreboding, a lamentation which eventually gives way to hope and faith. Isaiah understands his own inadequacy and limitations. Yet, he is able to appreciate giving way to possibility, recognizing that God has a plan and is indeed the arbiter of all things. Nothing positive comes of looking simply at his shortcomings; it is instructive to know that God sees beyond that. This is reflected in the colloquy between the Lord and Isaiah. The Lord says, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" In spite of his own sense of limitation, Isaiah responds, "Here I am—send me!" Isaiah's generosity of spirit, his apostolic availability, sees the other and so responds with freedom and openness.

In Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, he tells his brothers and sisters that Christ died for our sins, was buried and then rose from the dead. He expresses the fundamental truth and tenet of our faith that Jesus's own suffering and passion and subsequent death was not the final, definitive end of his public ministry. In rising from the dead, Jesus irrevocably frees us from the bonds of death and assures us, through promise, the gift of eternal life. Paul describes how, in the post-Resurrection, Jesus appeared to his closest companions, the twelve disciples, Cephas, James, five hundred brothers and then Paul himself.

Given his own history of persecution of the early Christian communities, Paul recognizes, in total humility, both that he is least among them and not fit to be called an apostle. It is, however, through the recognition of his own broken nature that "grace upon grace" is able to abound in his heart. That grace breaks through a previous arrogance and gives way to genuine humility and generosity. "It is by the grace of God I am what I am and his grace has not been ineffective." I would invite each of us to take time to pray and reflect upon these words in our own lives. "I am what I am and his grace has not been ineffective." This lends itself to an abiding experience of freedom, peace and openness. It helps us to remember that it is the Lord who calls us to discipleship and with God all things are possible.

The same doubt expressed by Isaiah and which is endemic of our human nature is also found in Simon Peter's response to Jesus's call and mission for him. Peter and his companions had been out all night fishing and by daybreak had not caught anything. When Jesus asks Simon Peter to go out again, to "put out into deep water," Simon is rightly skeptical and weary. Yet, in his capitulation and obedience to our Lord, he receives an abundance of riches and graces. Simon Peter is so overcome at the catch that he falls to his knees and says, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Does Jesus listen to him? No! He tells him not to be afraid and that his faith has prepared him to draw disciples to Jesus. These are words of great hope and possibility for us as well. We are well aware of our shortcomings and weaknesses. To be honest, sometimes in the silence of prayer and reflection, I feel totally unworthy of the mission and apostolate the Lord has entrusted to my care. Why has the Lord called me, called you, in the midst of our brokenness, to be shepherds and heralds of the Good News? The Lord forgives us time and again and invites us to a spirit of reconciliation and renewal. There is nothing we cannot do with the Lord as the anchor, the root, of our lives.