

Homily: Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C) 2022

On Friday I was at Buckingham Palace, visiting the Queen's Gallery. Her Majesty wasn't at home – she is at Sandringham, where today she will mark the 70th anniversary of her father's death, when she became queen. I was thinking about how her life has been totally dominated by her role: everything she does, where she goes, the people she meets: so many aspects of her long life have been decided by the fact that she is our Head of State. It might not have been so. It was only when her uncle abdicated that she became heir to the throne. Everything changed for her when her father unexpectedly became king. From that time on, her life would be completely different.

Today we meet in our readings three men whose lives changed completely and unexpectedly. In the first reading we hear of Isaiah, the great prophet of the 8th century BC who gives us some of the most joyful and hope-filled passages of the Old Testament. We heard of Isaiah's calling in today's first reading. He was given a glimpse into heaven and heard the angels singing words which we also sing at Mass: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts". He is called and sent by God, commissioned to speak on the Lord's behalf. Although he recognises that he is unworthy, the Lord reassures him that he is chosen for this task, and he accepts. His life would never be the same again.

In the second reading we have heard from St Paul. He speaks about the faith he has been taught: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures and that He was raised to life in accordance with the Scriptures" – also words that we echo at Mass, when we say the Creed. Paul tells of how he saw the risen Lord: this is the famous moment of his conversion on the road to Damascus. His life, too, would never be the same. He talks about being "born" in that moment; it was like a completely new life for him. He would leave behind the old ways of persecuting the followers of Jesus and become a great missionary, drawing many people to Christ. Like Isaiah, Paul is conscious of his sinfulness – he remembers the wrong he used to do but knows that God has called him to a new life.

Then in the Gospel we meet St Peter, the simple fisherman washing his nets by the lake when Jesus calls him. He and his companions have had an unproductive night, failing to catch any fish. At the word of Jesus, they put out the nets again, and draw in a huge catch. Peter recognises the greatness of the Lord and wants the Lord to look for someone more worthy. But Jesus simply tells him not to be afraid, and that he will have a new mission drawing people to the Lord. He accepts this task, and his life will never be the same again: he leaves everything to follow Jesus.

All three of these men found their lives dramatically changed when they encountered the Lord. Isaiah saw a glimpse of heaven; Paul saw the risen Lord on the Damascus road; Peter saw a glimpse of the power of Jesus in the miraculous catch of fish. All three knew that they were unworthy. Isaiah said, "What a wretched state I am in! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips"; St Paul writes, "I am the least of the apostles; in fact, since I persecuted the Church of God, I hardly deserve the name apostle"; St Peter tells Jesus: "Leave me, Lord, I

am a sinful man.” All three met the Lord; all three knew their unworthiness, and all three had their lives radically changed by the encounter with God.

So this got me thinking: how does my faith radically change my life? I have also encountered God: not, perhaps, in dramatic visions and miracles like Isaiah, Paul or Peter; but I encounter Him regularly in prayer, in the sacraments, in His Word, in the community of the Church. How does it change me? How would my life be different if I didn't have faith? It's possible to live our lives like everybody else in our world: the same pressures, the same pleasures, the same joys and hope, the same worries, the same priorities... and then simply to come to Mass on a Sunday and hopefully say a few prayers during the week. But that's not our calling. We are called to live as disciples, as followers of Jesus. The first disciples left everything to follow the Lord: their lives changed completely. How is my life different because of my faith?

I spent a little time in prayer considering this question. Here are the things that I think are different about my life because I have faith. I can think of the strength my faith brings: strength sometimes to accept things that are difficult in life or to find peace in times of anxiety, knowing that everything is ultimately in the Lord's hands. I can find hope in the face of grief and loss, and also of injustice, knowing that God will in time make everything right. I can think of ways in which I'm a better person because of my faith: times when I have given more of my time, energy or resources than I wanted to, driven on by a desire to do God's will. I don't claim to be anything special! I'm simply saying that my faith has compelled me to be a better person than I would otherwise be. Faith has given me strength to forgive when I didn't want to; it makes me prioritise my life differently, at least when I let it! It has brought me into new and life-giving relationships and friendships with others. It affects the ways I make decisions, because I try to listen to what God is asking of me, not just what I want to do or what seems right to me.

These are some of the ways my faith makes a difference to me. Your list may be very different to mine. But hopefully all of us can see many ways in which our life is different because we are followers of Jesus. We don't live with our faith tacked on to our lives; we try to live with faith permeating every part of life, allowing God's presence, guidance and strength to be our foundation. My suggestion for this week is to give it a little thought. How does your faith change your life? What does it mean for you to be a follower of Jesus? Unworthy as we all are, He has called us to follow Him, telling us: “Do not be afraid.” Let's hear His voice and let Him change our lives for the better. Today, at this Mass, we encounter Jesus in each other, in the Scriptures and in the Eucharist. How will we allow this encounter with God to change our lives in the week ahead?

Fr Andrew

