

5th Sunday of Ordinary Time “We Are Cracked Pots”

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Let's begin with a story I like from Anthony De Mello entitled “Jars of Clay”. It begins...A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water in his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." "Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?" "I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

The moral of the story? Each of us has our own unique flaws. We are all cracked pots. But if we will allow it, the Lord will use our flaws to grace his Father's table. In God's great economy, nothing goes to waste. I share this story because it seems to fit so well with our readings this Sunday. God calls Isaiah to conversion in our first reading and gives him the greatest honor in the world; to be a prophet of the most high. Isaiah's response? "I am doomed! Woe is me!" He says, "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!" How about our second reading. St. Paul recalls his conversion. St. Paul tells the Corinthians that after the Risen Lord appeared to Cephas and the Twelve, "Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

In our Gospel reading, Jesus steps onto Peter's boat and invites him to put out a short distance from the shore so he can proclaim the Gospel from the boat to the masses of people gathering along the shore. Afterwards, he invites Peter to put out into deep water and lower his nets for a catch. Peter shrugs his shoulders, shares with Jesus that this request seemed silly. There is no fish out there. And yet, the number of fish that was caught was so outrageous that it was obvious to everyone that they just witnessed a miracle. Jesus, however, never performs a miracle without a specific reason. Jesus' miracles has purpose to them.

This is why, once they were on shore, Simon Peter knew what was happening. The catch of so many fish was very metaphorical of what Jesus wanted Peter to do next. Simon Peter pre-empts Jesus' request by falling on his knees, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Without blinking, Jesus responds, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men". I like how Jesus didn't ask Peter to follow him. Jesus just tells him.

This Sunday we have three great readings that celebrate three great people who share some things in common. What unites Isaiah, Paul and Simon Peter? For one, they were all called to a vocation of serving God. They didn't think in the wildest dreams that God would call them to service. Secondly, after God's invitation, they were immediately aware of their sinfulness and inadequacies. They felt like cracked pots. I think we can all relate with that. Thirdly, and most importantly however, through conversion, faith and courage, Isaiah, Paul and Simon Peter said "yes". They said yes. Even though they felt unworthy and inadequate, they trusted that God would provide them sufficient grace.

What is the moral of our readings this Sunday? Here is what I think. In our times of guilt, in our times of shame, in our times of humiliation, in the times we feel like cracked pots, Jesus Christ knocks on our doors. When Jesus knocks on our doors and we may feel unworthy, inadequate, we may even think that we are a lost cause, at home, at work, at school, or in life. In the times we feel most unworthy, Jesus knocks on our door. Jesus always has a way of seeing something about us that we can't see. Jesus then asks us to trust in what he sees. Trust in Jesus. Trust in the Sacraments. Trust in the power of conversion. If we do this long enough, something might happen. Jesus might very well challenge us to sail into deep waters like he challenged Simon Peter in our Gospel reading. Let's contemplate that for a moment.

When Jesus invites us to take the risk and sail our boats into deep waters; that is a serious request. Deep waters for fishermen represent a dangerous place and at times a frightening place where we are invited to simply trust in the Lord. What does the invitation to sail out into deep waters mean for you? Do we dare sail out into deep water with the Lord? Think about what this might mean. What is the Lord calling you to be in the Body of Christ? God calls and we must answer. What is holding us back?

You see, my friends, as we contemplate the witnesses of Isaiah, Paul and Peter this weekend, it is when we have faith, it is when we have courage, and it is when we have the trust Jesus calls us to, that is when amazing things happen in life. Fully aware of our flaws, Jesus calls us to conversion. Despite our imperfections, Jesus calls us to mission. The good news of the Gospel this weekend might be best summarized in this way: When we allow Jesus to carry us through life, even cracked pots can be surprised by grace.