

ORDINARY SUNDAY V “C”  
FEBRUARY 9/10, 2019  
COMMUNAL ANOINTING OF THE SICK

At first glance, this weekend’s Scriptures and our annual celebration of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick would seem to have nothing in common. The reading from the prophet Isaiah, the Gospel, and the end of the passage from St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians center on the event of the vocational call of the prophet; Jesus’ summoning his first disciples—Peter, Andrew, James and John, with emphasis given to Peter; and finally the apostle Paul. What could these “call stories” have in common with the celebration of the sacrament that emphasizes healing?

Actually, quite a lot. Isaiah as he encounters God’s call states: “Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5), translation: “I am a sinner.” The Gospel scene of the dialog between Jesus and Peter makes the same point as Peter says to Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Lk. 5:8). Finally, after stating the received teaching of the first Christians regarding Jesus’ death and resurrection Saint Paul recounts his own encounter with the Risen Jesus and his call to apostleship declares that his call is one “born abnormally” (I Cor. 15:8), a sinner, a persecutor of the faith now called to be its herald. Isaiah, Peter the other first disciples, and Paul in their encounter with God (for Peter, Paul and the others through Jesus) all come face-to-face with their “dis-ease”, their sin, their human weakness. In the verses immediately preceding today’s Gospel St. Luke records Jesus healing Peter’s mother-in-law of a debilitating fever which had rendered her bedridden as well as many people afflicted with various diseases and demonic possession (Lk. 4:40,41). The message is loud and clear—in Jesus God’s mercy, healing and forgiveness is revealed, active in the world physically and spiritually.

Zeroing in on Peter as he exposes the wound of his human sinfulness to Jesus, he is urged by Jesus to “not be afraid” (Lk. 5:10) of his weakness, sinfulness, self-perceived unworthiness. Googling “Be Not Afraid” reveals that these words on the lips of God the Father, Jesus, or an angel appear 365 times in the Bible! Think of it, every day of the year God is telling us in one way of another “Be not afraid.” In the First Letter of St. John we are given a clue as to why.

John tells us that “perfect love drives out fear” (I Jn. 4:18); not our love for God, but God’s love for us! God desires, bestows, perfect, complete, love in his relationship with us, and in perfect love there is no room for fear. God does not promise us that we will never experience trial, sufferings of various kinds, weakness, failure, sin, and ultimately death. After all, Jesus experienced all of these, except sin, though he suffered the effects of human sin. Even in his hour of abandonment on the cross Jesus could say, “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit” (Lk. 23:42). Jesus’ faith sustained him because he lived in the Father’s perfect love for him.

For those among us who will be anointed today, Jesus comes to you, lays his hand upon you, raises you up and says to you, “Be not afraid”. To all of us who like Isaiah, Peter, Andrew, James, John and Paul at times may feel, (and even quite possibly believe) that we could be (or are) unworthy of God’s presence and love due to a past or present state of sinfulness, Jesus also comes to us and says, “Do not be afraid”, I call you to be my disciples not because you choose me, but because I have chosen you to go forth and bear fruit (Jn. 15: 16ff). Your weakness like Isaiah, Peter, Andrew, James, John and Paul is the means through which I will be present and working at building my Father’s Kingdom in the world. “Be not afraid.”