

5th Sunday of the year C

Isaiah 6:1-2,3-8

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Children love playing “telephone.” You know the game. Children stand in a circle and one of them whispers something to the next person in line, who then whispers it to the next person, and so on. By the time the message gets back to the beginning of the circle, it has invariably changed beyond recognition. Why does the message change? Two reasons: either people did not clearly hear what was said to them or they did not clearly pass on what they heard.

In today’s second reading from Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul reflects on his role as an apostle of Christ. Even though Paul did not meet Jesus face-to-face in his lifetime, Paul was sure that he was passing on the authentic teaching of Christ. Paul’s certitude is based not on the many visions of Christ that he enjoyed but on the teaching that he received from those who were apostles before him. “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received” (1 Corinthians 15:3). In other words, Paul understood his ministry as essentially that of passing on the message. To succeed in doing this, two things are most important: how one receives the tradition, and how one passes it on. Using the analogy of playing the “telephone,” in order to transmit the message faithfully down the line, each person in the chain must endeavour to hear correctly what is being passed on to him or her, and then make sure that he or she passes it on faithfully to the next person.

Are we faithfully passing on the message of Christ to our people today? To answer this question we need first to ask ourselves (a) how faithful are we in hearing the message of Christ? and (b) how effective are we in passing it on to others?

To hear faithfully the message of Christ means to do everything possible to improve our understanding of the Good News that Jesus brought to the world. Here the Bible is of supreme importance. We need to do all we can to improve our Bible reading habits and skills. Parish symbolon Bible study groups are very helpful in this regard. We had a very good discussion on the holy Eucharist and real presence of Christ. In the discussion I could sense different levels of understanding about the real presence. One thing that posted in the discussion was, why the taste, smell and look does not change in the bread. What is taking place is the transubstantiation that is change of substance. What is going in to bread is the soul of Christ. The bread does not change its colour or smell because the soul in any species is not visible. The ability to read and understand the Bible is of supreme importance because, as St Jerome said, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

Having understood the essential message of Christ, we then take on the second phase of our duty as faithful messengers, namely, passing on the message. The unchangeable word of God is always expressed and celebrated in changeable traditions. Hence the need to understand the cultural situation of those with whom we want to share the message. Missionaries to foreign lands know the need to learn the language and culture of a people before they can share the word of God with them effectively. Similarly, in our bid to pass on the message to young people today, we must understand that they live in a different sub-culture. To effectively pass on the message of Christ to them we must

use the vernacular, the art-forms, and the values that they can identify with. In so doing we do not change the message of Christ, we only change the medium through which it is expressed and transmitted.

Like St Paul, we are called to hear the word of God and to share it with others. Our duty is to ensure that we hear it correctly and pass it on without any distortions as the kids do when they play "telephone." Let us resolve today to take steps to learn to hear and understand the word of God better, and faithfully to pass it on to those coming after us.

The gospel presents to us the need of trust in the lord. One of the most amazing acts in a circus is always the trapeze artists. Beyond the timing, courage and physical strength of these artists, it's hard not to contemplate the deep confidence and trust they have in one another that allows them to abandon one swinging bar to cling to another person.

The same courage, strength and trust it takes for a trapeze artist to let go of that first bar is required of a Christian. Christians must abandon the secure things of this world and, with total trust, reach out and unite their lives to Jesus.

The disciples display this type of trust in today's Gospel. After fishing all night and being frustrated because they caught nothing, they wash their nets and are ready to go home. At the word of the passing preacher, Jesus, they lower their nets again. After the miraculous catch, they are called to abandon it all - family, livelihood and the catch of fish - to follow him. They let go of their secure lives and follow Jesus.

We see the same courage, strength and trust of a trapeze artist in Saint Paul. He abandons his staunch persecution of the Church and his Pharisaic ways. He becomes not only a Christian, but the boldest preacher of the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

How did the disciples find that courage? For them, it was not a leap of faith into thin air. It was a leap of faith toward Jesus' outstretched hand. These disciples put their faith in Jesus. If we are going to make this same leap of faith, we must know Jesus, believe in him and place our trust in him. Like the disciples, we must place our lives into his hands.

Faith enables us to let go. We have to let go of our doubts so as to believe. We have to let go of the need to control life and give it to God. We have to let go of our sins and grab onto God's mercy. We have to abandon feelings of unworthiness and let God purify us through his mercy. We must leave behind anything that holds us back, do the best that we can, and then put our lives into the hands of God.