

## Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

February 7, 2016 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

As we come together on this first Sunday of the shortest month of the year, this is not only the last Sunday in Ordinary Time in our liturgical calendar, but this happens to be Super Bowl 50. It's the day when most people will gather together with family and friends, football fans and non-football fans, and enjoy what has become known as the big game, this year between the Carolina Panthers and the Denver Broncos. And so, this is a "super" special Sunday in all aspects of our lives.

What makes our gathering together as people of faith "super" special is that this is the last Sunday in Ordinary Time for more than three months. Since Lent begins on Wednesday of this week, this Sunday is also special because this is the last Sunday for us as a community of faith to sing "Alleluia" for at least six weeks. Ash Wednesday begins for us the 40-day penitential season of Lent. The "Alleluia" falls silent during these next six weeks as we prepare for the great and joyful Feast of Easter. Easter is the reason why we, as people of faith, are able to live our faith in hope--- because, as my own Episcopal motto reminds me every day, we are continually "*waiting in joyful hope*" for the coming of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Scripture Readings for this Sunday before Lent really help us to prepare for the ways that we might consider approaching Lent 2016 in this Jubilee Year of Mercy.

As we know, Lent gives each of us the opportunity to confront sin in our lives. In fact on Ash Wednesday, (a day, by the way, of complete fast and abstinence in keeping with its solemn sacrificial nature), we will allow ashes to be placed on our foreheads as a sign of our own mortality and sinfulness. We will hear the words: "*Turn away from sin, and believe in the Gospel*", or "*Remember you are dust, and unto dust you shall return.*" Admittedly, reminding ourselves that one day we will die is not the most pleasant topic to consider, nor is the reality that "sin," to one degree or another, has control of our lives. Lent is our annual "reality check"--- that reminder that, as much as we like to see ourselves in the best possible light, we are susceptible to the influence and power of sin more than we would like to admit. In fact, in these times in which we live, society seems to recognize only our human need for pleasure and self-fulfillment with no sense of consequences or accountability. Lent is the season for us to hear the truth and a time for us once again to come back to our common sense awareness that we

are far from perfect and that we must take this season of Lent seriously as an opportunity for growth and change---a true turning away from sin in our lives.

The Scripture Readings we have just heard help to set the stage for this important season that is upon us.

In the First Reading, the prophet Isaiah, who was already an ambassador for the court of the King of Judah, had a vision in which God was calling him to leave that part of his life behind and to become God's prophet. Part of Isaiah's vision was of what consistently goes on in Heaven, as the angels and saints praise God: "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. All the earth is filled with His glory.*" Those are the practically the very same words that we pray at every Mass as we enter into the Eucharistic Prayer: "*Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your Glory. Hosanna in the highest.*" The "hosts" in that song of praise refer to all the angels and saints in Heaven, not the word that we use for the consecrated Bread that becomes the Body of Christ. Our God is the God of all the Heavens and the earth---- and as His people, we are called constantly to give Him praise through the way we live our lives.

In today's Second Reading from St. Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul was reflecting on his own life---a life in which he had been a great sinner until he encountered the Risen Lord on one of his travels; from that point on, St. Paul tried to leave sin behind as he wholeheartedly followed Christ and became one of the greatest preachers of the faith ever to live.

And in today's Gospel Reading, Jesus "called" Simon (Peter) and several other fishermen to follow Him. When Peter witnessed the tremendous and miraculous catch of fish, and realized that Jesus was someone truly special and Holy, he could not help but be overcome by his own sinfulness, which is why he said: "*Depart from me Lord for I am a sinful man.*"

In each of those situations, Isaiah, Paul and Peter heard God's call for them to turn away from sin and to live in the hope of the new life that God had in mind for each of them.

Dear Friends in Christ, Jesus speaks the same words to us that He spoke to Peter: "*Do not be afraid.*" Sometimes it can be scary for us to have an honest look at our own lives. If we only compare ourselves to our neighbors, or to those with whom we work, or to the average human being, we might very well conclude: "I'm a pretty decent human being." But God the Father gave us His very own Son Jesus to be our Savior, and our Model. When we compare ourselves with Him, we may very well have the same reaction as Peter: we might feel very

unworthy. But Jesus, Who wants only for us to be truly happy, tells us not to be afraid---not to worry---to simply follow Him and we will find eternal life. To take that invitation seriously, we need to be serious about wanting to “turn away from sin” and to live our lives in the hope of the Risen Jesus. This season of Lent that is about to be upon us is a wonderful and important opportunity. Just as God was not interested in excuses from Isaiah, Paul or Peter, He urges us to put aside our excuses or delays, He tells us “Do not be afraid---I am with you always.”

May we choose to follow the example of Isaiah who said: “*Here I am---send me.*”; in the example of St. Paul who said: “*By the grace of God, I am what I am.*”; in the example of St. Peter who left his former life behind and followed Jesus so faithfully that He became Christ’s Vicar on earth. Most important of all, may we choose to follow Jesus, because He is the cause of our faith, the source of our hope and the example of all love.

God bless you, now and always!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley