

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT - Year C
25 February, 2007

1. **Mottos, vision and value statements** are currently in fashion. Most schools, towns, and businesses proudly display a motto, a vision statement and a list of values. The best of them are statements of what they believe about themselves, what they stand for, and how they are going to operate. Such statements are not new. You'll find them in today's readings, although in religious language we are more likely to call them confessions.
2. **Deuteronomy 26.1-11 contains one of the earliest confessions by the people of God.** It is the recital of the Exodus, the great saving act of God in rescuing and forming the identity of his people, and in fulfilling his covenant promise to bring them into the promised land. The confession takes place within a liturgy of thanksgiving and praise for God's salvation.
3. **The basic Christian confession of faith** (*Jesus, the one whom God raised from the dead, is Lord*) is made at Baptism where the congregation also enjoins the new Christian to *confess Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, look for his coming in glory.* The same mystery is recited in the Great Thanksgiving of the Eucharist. *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.*
4. **And the Gospel shows Jesus making a three-fold confession to overcome temptation.** It's as if Jesus is making a values statement: *One does not live by bread alone; worship the Lord your God and serve only him; and do not put the Lord your God to the test.* This confession allows Jesus to take a stand against those things which might tempt him. It gave him single-mindedness in concentrating on his mission and set out the way he was going to work in his ministry.
5. **Lent is a time for confession.** During this first week of Lent you might think of the confession of faith which you could make personally. What can you say about Christ? What is the story of your own salvation? What values will help you overcome temptation, guide the way you live your life and perform your ministry?

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY - Year C
4 February, 2007

1. **A call is "a summons, an invitation, a bidding"**, and so we speak of a call to arms, a call to prayer, a call to the Bar, and a call to ministry. God called Isaiah through a vision and a verbal summons. Jesus called Simon and the other fishermen with a miracle, and Paul with a bright light and a voice from heaven. All very dramatic and leaving little doubt for those so summoned that they were needed for divine service.
2. You can receive a summons, invitation or bidding in many different ways. A loud voice, an official edict, a request from a community, an inquiry from someone you respect, a letter, a phone call - but it can be more subtle than that - the sight of someone in need calls you to respond, the rhythm of music bids you dance, the aroma of food calls you to eat, a vision of beauty calls you to paint. And just as subtle is a nagging sense of this is what you were meant to do. It's often like this in Christian ministry. Have you had a call from God? **Is God calling you now?**
3. Sometimes our response at hearing a call is, "Oh, no, not me". (Isaiah "Woe is me. I'm not holy enough", Simon, "Go away because I'm sinful", and Paul, "I'm unfit because I persecuted the Church".) **Do you feel inadequate to respond to Christ's call? Are you finding excuses to say no to a call to ministry? Trust that you are forgiven and that your strength will be in God.**
4. Saying YES is a step in faith and one which begins a great mystery. Isaiah said YES and God gave him the words to confront King and people. Simon was summoned into deep water and had the promise of a huge catch, Paul was able to proclaim Christ by grace and to be sustained by the Spirit of Christ working in him. **Say yes today and be surprised at the adventure you will begin for we have Jesus' promise that he will be with us in Spirit to teach, strengthen and empower us.**
5. Each of us has been called into the Church and been given gifts for ministry. The final blessing in the confirmation service (p.93 APBA) reminds us of the various aspects of this call. The call to pray, learn and worship as a member of the Church, the call to share the love of Christ and his gospel of reconciliation and hope; and the call to work for peace and justice. We commit ourselves to our calling in the strength of the Holy Spirit. **May we never be afraid to put out into deep waters** trusting in the grace of the Spirit to give us strength to fulfil our calling in the particular way and particular place we are called to do it.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY - YEAR C
11 February, 2007

1. In our arid land we particularly appreciate the imagery which comes from a dry landscape. We understand the blessing of reliable water and the woe of drought, failed crops and windblown topsoil. And what is true in nature is true in human existence: woe to the person who trusts in mere mortals and blessed is the person whose trust is in the Lord. **Those with deep roots into God will withstand whatever hardship comes.**
2. Jesus places before those who have made a commitment an ethical demand. Trust in man is the attitude of the rich, who eat well, who laugh and make merry and live for themselves. Society may praise them and see them as successful but how deep are their roots? How do they relate to God? How blessed are they? What is their ultimate hope? Those who trust in the Lord are those who know that they have nothing in themselves which will give them a right relationship with God. **Riches and plenty are not the problem; the problem is where the heart is.**
3. **Following Christ requires a new way of life**, a new way of looking at the world. It is a life which is wholly dependent upon trust in God. It requires not seeing ourselves as self-made and self-sufficient, and self-serving. The "I'm all right, Jack" attitude of Australians, the corporate world's striving for greater wealth, the desire of ordinary people for McMansions and unreal mortgages, the longing to win the lottery, the "if only I had more money I would be happy" view of life, are all challenged by Jesus' ethics. These are all worldly things and cannot give everlasting happiness.
4. **"Your reward is great in heaven"**. Blessedness is the state of life eternal, it is drinking God's life-giving water; it is relying on God for security; it is experiencing love and justice and peace in the kingdom of God. It is looking forward to the resurrection **and it is living a life full of hope.**

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY - YEAR C
18 February, 2007

1. *Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6.27-38)*
We are to behave to others as God has treated us. Jesus' listeners would be well aware of the times God had been merciful to them as a people. The Old Testament reading for today is one example: the saving from famine by finding a safe haven in Egypt. (Genesis 45.3-11, 15) There were many others: the flight from Egypt, food and drink supplied in the desert, and the return from exile.
2. **How do we hear these words today?** How do we, God's people today, experience mercy? We can answer in terms of forgiveness, grace and hope. Through the death and resurrection of Christ new possibilities of life are open to us to live freely, free from guilt and blame, free to grow as authentic human beings in the image of God, and freed from an understanding of death as the conqueror of all that is loving and lovely. God is merciful - like the Father forgiving and welcoming his dissolute son, like Jesus who did not condemn the prostitute. Each of us can find a mirror image of ourselves in the Bible as a person turned around by Christ's mercy and grace. Are you a Matthew or a Zacchaeus, a Mary Magdalene, or a Martha? When has God not condemned us for our thoughts and actions but instead has challenged or healed or opened our eyes or stopped our paralysis and gently led us - saving us from the natural consequences of our own shortcomings and deliberate actions?
3. **And how do we apply the maxim, *Be merciful, love your enemies*?** How do we respond to beggars? How do we react when someone in need takes from us who have? How do we react when wronged? How did people feel about the two Bali bombings? People in our society are often vengeful. Relatives of victims can be seen on TV often violently demanding retribution. Demands for compensation for hurt, whether intentional or accidental, reach astronomical heights. Of course, there is justice, and just compensation is not being questioned but wherever payment is made and recompense done, as Christians, we will hear Jesus' words echoing, *Be merciful as your Father is merciful?*