

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 6, 2022

Reflection by Sister Susan Quaintance, OSB

Is 6:1-2a, 3-8; 1 Cor 15:1-11; Lk 5:1-11

Many of you will remember Ursuline Sr. Agnes Coveney, who lived with us for a while, when she was doing her CPE at St. Francis, as part of her PhD program in Medical Ethics at Loyola. Even after she had moved close to campus when her CPE was finished, she still occasionally came for evening prayer and supper. One time I will always remember – and I apologize to those of you who have already heard this story multiple times – is one Friday night. After the heb had introduced the reading from the Rule, as Judy has upstairs this week, with the words, “From the Rule of our Holy Father Benedict: Chapter 7: Humility, Continued,” Agnes turned to me, smiled that gentle smile of hers, and whispered, “Kind of the story of life.” Indeed. “Humility, continued” has become a kind of mantra for me in those moments when I am embarrassed about a mistake I’ve made or humbled by a glimpse at who I really am instead of who I pretend or want to be.

I was reminded of this story by this morning’s readings. In all three – it’s one of those rare Sundays when I can find a through-line in the three selections we’re given – there is an expression of humility in the face of call. Isaiah 6:5: “Woe is me, I am doomed. For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips.” I Cor 15:9: “For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle.” Luke 5:8: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Isaiah, Paul, and Peter all know how unworthy they are to glimpse the holiness of God or do what they are being asked to do – and, yet, they all stand firm and say, in one way or another, “Here I am.” We could spend the day filling in the stories of what happens to all three after that.

As I was thinking about all of this, I got to pondering how vocation changes as one ages. In fact that’s the topic of a class that Belinda is teaching at Sheil this month, “Vocation in Every Stage of Life.” Though all of us can name plenty of ways in which being younger was pretty sweet – bodies that worked better, lots of opportunities ahead that seemed possible and exciting, brains that were quick and reliable – vocation discerning may be a place where the older have a leg up on the younger. All of us know that vocation isn’t a “one and done” event. Circumstances shift, health changes, souls grow or shrink, depending on how they are tended. Yet call continues. The better I know myself – which, hopefully, decades attempting a life of contemplation and prayer have aided – the better I can hear what God is asking of me today.

As I was walking over to church this morning, I was also thinking about how the opposite can be true. King Lear makes a disastrous retirement choice in Act I, and as his two oldest daughters are discussing it, Regan says to Goneril, “’Tis the infirmity of his age . . . he hath but ever slenderly known himself” (I.1.339-40).

A question comes to mind. “What is something I know about myself *now* that informs my vocation today?” I want to spend some time thinking about that; maybe you might, too.

Humility, continued.