

## ***“I Have Seen the King, the Lord of Hosts”***

These lectionaries – these schedules of bible readings appointed for the Sundays and Feast Days of the Church year – are not just thrown together, but are appointed for each day for a reason.

Smarter people than me have put these lectionaries together– but from time to time, as I am preparing to write a sermon, I find myself asking – why was this particular text of Holy Scripture chosen?

Well, since we are in the Season of Epiphany – that question is often answered by asking another question – “What is the epiphany here in our text?” In other words, how is God being “manifested” – or shown forth – revealed to us?

The quick answer for this text from St. Luke 5 might be that the miraculous catch of fish is the epiphany – and indeed, that does reveal Jesus as the Lord – and shows us the power of His Word.

But there is another epiphany – the main epiphany I would contend. That which stands out is that it is revealed to Peter that he, a sinful man, is in the presence of the Lord God Almighty.

Like Isaiah in the Old Testament reading – he is in the temple, and it is revealed to him (an epiphany) – that he is in the presence of the Holy One. There he sees the Lord – and hears the seraphim angels singing back and forth to one another – “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”

Peter is in a boat with Jesus – out in the depths of the lake of Gennesaret – and it is the miraculous catch of fish that is swamping the boat that reveals to Peter who this Jesus is. We sometimes forget that Jesus looked like any other ordinary man. He didn’t walk around with a glow – angels were not constantly swirling around Him singing their Sanctus’. He probably didn’t have a booming James Earl Jones voice. But there in that boat – by the power of His almighty Word – Peter is made to see who this man Jesus is.

Peter and all the others with him were astonished at this catch of fish – but Peter is also afraid – not because their boats were sinking – but because he, a sinful man, realizes that he stands in the presence of the holy and sinless God.

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Or, to use the words of Isaiah – “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” An epiphany – a frightening epiphany indeed.

Peter is sunk. His sinful condition prevents him from being in the presence of the holy and sinless God – and the boats threatening to sink into the dark depths of the lake (commonly thought of as the realm of the demons) no doubt have gotten Peter’s attention and preach to him that this is where he belongs.

The epiphany for Isaiah is similar in that the presence of the holy and sinless God is accompanied by the shaking of the thresholds as the temple is filled with smoke. Standing in the presence of the Lord God Almighty leaves sinners shaking in their boots and crying out – “Woe is me! For I am lost ...”

Dearly beloved, this very day as we stand in the house of God, we have confessed that we are sinners – that is obvious – that we cannot deny. What is not obvious to us is that we stand in the presence of the holy and sinless God – just as Isaiah and Peter did. It’s not obvious to us – even though it is revealed to us over and over again.

God’s Word reveals this truth – “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them,” Jesus says (Matt. 18:20). “This is my body ... this is my blood” – the very Body and Blood of the crucified and risen Lord – right here, in the midst of us.

The liturgy and the hymns reveal this truth. “The veil is torn, our Priest we see, as at the rail on bended knee our hungry mouths from Him receive the bread of immortality” (LSB 624.5). “Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven” – we stand before God, and – “we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising you” and singing our “holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth.”

Even our posture in worship reveals this truth – as we bow when singing the Gloria Patri – as we kneel at the rail – and as we bow before His altar – all because the Lord is present here!.

There is no smoke. No shaking of the thresholds. No visible angels or visible Jesus. No sinking of the boat in which we sit. Often times, just a ho hum, “I a poor miserable sinner ...”

Dearly beloved, the Lord hides His presence from us for our protection. Like a bug that flies into a backyard bug zapper – a sinner cannot stand in the presence of the holy and sinless God. However, the Lord reveals His presence among us for our salvation.

As we see from the miraculous catch of fish – the Lord is present in the Ark of His Church – and His Word does what it says. His baptismal promises both kill and make alive – He drowns our Old Adam with all his sinful desires – and resurrects the new man.

His Absolution draws us up out of the depths of darkness and the realm of demons – rescuing us, setting us free from all that entraps us – and brings us into the light, into His holy Church, into His presence.

From the altar He takes His Body and Blood and touches our lips. “Do not be afraid – your guilt is taken away – your sin is atoned for by my sacrifice in your place – my blood cleanses you from all that would destroy you. You are safe with me.”

Dearly beloved, let us not fear to come into the presence of our Lord – for in Christ Jesus you have been made holy – and reconciled to the Lord God Almighty.

Today we gather around our Christ – looking forward to that Great Epiphany – when we shall see Him face to face, and live with Him for all eternity.

Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.