

[Readings: Isaiah 6:1-2, 3-8; Ps. 138; 1 Cor. 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11]

HAPPY WORLD DAY OF MARRIAGE! I thank God for the married couples in our parish who witness to the presence of God in their lives, in their relationship, and in their children and grandchildren. They are fruitful when they live in the present and hope for the future. And they put the past in proper perspective.

The past can be a poison pill, a capsule of regret: for what we did, for what we failed to do. *We should have taken that job. We should have fought harder for that relationship.* When we dwell on yesterday, we revive old injuries and refresh old anger. *My parents never supported me. The system was against people like me.* We remember words that were said and can't be "un-said." *I shouldn't have called him a liar! They said I was a quitter, so I became one.* Or we relive old victories, longing for what was and can't be again. *I had such beautiful hair.* (I still do have beautiful hair. It's got a few gray hairs filling out. People say I look more distinguished!

A little girl noticed that her mom was getting gray and white strings of hair on her brunette head. The little girl asked, "Where do those hairs come from, Mommy? Seeing this a chance to make her child think, the mom said, "You know, honey, every time YOU do something bad, a gray or white hair shows up on MY head." The little girl thought for a moment and then observed, "You must have been a terrible child, Mommy, because Grandma's hair is all WHITE!"

Too often, living with the past comes down to living *in* the past. If we take this poison pill each new morning, it paralyzes the present, and dissolves the future in a haze of nostalgia. So we must refuse it.

We have to create a new habit. We have to reestablish the spirit we had as children, what's known as Beginner's Mind. Clean like a blank page. Open and receptive and eager to learn something new, to go in whatever direction becomes available.

This is how it was for Simon Peter that day at the lake. The Sea of Galilee was also called Gennesaret, "the Lake of the Garden of Riches," because it was surrounded by fertile land and a prosperous community that inhabited nine major towns. People who worked hard did well around there

Their chief occupations were fishing, farming, stone-masonry, and carpentry. But Peter isn't doing so well that day. A whole night given over to fishing and yet his nets are empty in the morning. He must have been tired and disappointed. Then a preacher from over in Nazareth asked to use Peter's boat as a platform from which to teach. Why not? It was certainly no use fishing with it.

Peter could have hunkered down in his boat that morning, closed down his heart, and surrendered himself to his failure the night before. He could have relived every hour -- every useless throw of the net -- every wrong decision made: location, direction, bait. He could have blamed his wife for sabotaging his attitude -- or perhaps his sick mother-in-law, whose medical condition distracted him.

He could have taken that poison pill marked "yesterday" and let it kill his spirit. Then Jesus asks him to take the boat out again and lower the nets.

If Peter was focused on yesterday, he would never have done it. If past failure was huge within him, he wouldn't have the courage.

But Peter said “no” to yesterday, and “yes” to today, placing all his hope in Jesus. It was a good decision!

The readings this week simply says: God does invite us, but we don't think we deserve it. In our First Reading, Isaiah gets to see God -- and live -- and receives his call directly from the heavenly court. In our Second Reading, Jesus Himself appears to the last person to whom you would have expected: His ugly ex-persecutor Paul. In the Gospel, Peter, along with the other two of the “Big Three” apostles, accepts their mission straight from Christ. Married couples have a mission to give witness.

And Paul admits that, “By the grace of God, I am what I am, and God's grace to me has not been ineffective.”

This is one of my favorite New Testament quotes. But I say it in the positive: “God's grace to me has been effective.”

Despite their protestations of inadequacy, these three are actually quite privileged and -- as it turned out -- ready to follow God completely. Three figures this week protest they are unworthy. Isaiah says, “I am a man of unclean lips.” Saint Paul says, “I am the least of the apostles.” Saint Peter says, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Nonetheless, they are chosen to witness God's glory and advance God's mission.

Whoever you are, however unworthy you may feel, God has something important for you to do.

What is it? And what is holding you back? Find out for yourselves this week.

And remember: by the grace of God, you are what you are, and God's grace in you has been effective!

Say it with me: “By God’s grace... I am what I am... And God’s grace... has been effective in me.”

So, “do not be afraid,” because from this present day forward, YOU will be bringing people to the Lord, starting with yourself.

AMEN!