

Week 5 - Ordinary Time – February 7, 2010

Boy Scouts of America was founded 100 years ago this Monday. Since that time over 110 million people have joined Scouting; today over four and a half million young men and women wear the Scout uniform. Part of the Scout Law says that Scouts are reverent and promise to do their duty to God. Because of that, many religious organizations sponsor Scout troops, but all believers should remember reverence and duty, whether or not we are Scouts.

When it comes to these two traits, the prophet Isaiah offers an outstanding example. Last week we heard the call of Jeremiah the prophet. Today we hear God calling Isaiah. Isaiah goes to the Temple in Jerusalem one day to pray, and he has a vision greater than anything he could have imagined before. He sees God; he sees God. The Lord is seated on a high and lofty throne, wearing royal garments, and the train of his robe is so long it completely fills the Temple. Seraphim are stationed above. Unlike Isaiah, they do not dare to look upon God. Instead they cry out to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" They are reverent in the presence of God. Isaiah soon realizes how holy God is, and he sees himself as a poor contrast. As with any of us, Isaiah probably thought a lot about himself; he may have put other people down. We all say things to place ourselves in the center of our universe, much to the annoyance of the people who live and work with us. We often expect other people to show reverence to us. But when Isaiah sees the greatness of God, he gets a new insight about himself: "Woe is me, I am doomed!"

No matter how egotistical each of us gets, there are moments when we come crashing back to earth. We learn how wrong we were to someone in the past, or how difficult we have made life for the people we love. When we feel unworthy, we may go in one of two different directions. We can retreat, go into our shell, never try to correct the things that went wrong, and say things like, "That person could never forgive me," or "I'm not worthy to try this ever again." Or after painfully admitting our faults, we may try again and accomplish more because we have new insights about ourselves, other people, and God. In Isaiah's case, probably reflecting some things he said in the past, he admitted, "I am a man of unclean lips." He could have ended his career right there. But God had another idea. One of the angels grabbed a pair of tongs, plucked a burning coal from the incense pot, flew across the room and seared Isaiah's lips with it, saying, "your wickedness is removed, your sin purged." After that, when God asked, "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah was ready. "Send me!"

After becoming reverent, Isaiah accepted his duty to God, like a good Scout. Every time we come to mass, we quote today's first reading; we sing what the Seraphim sang in the presence of God. "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of power of might." That hymn calls us to be reverent. When we sing it well, we may see ourselves as a poor contrast. But God can make us worthy. God may purge us through some event that could be painful, and then he may ask us to do our duty. At that point, we'll be ready. "Here I am. Send me!"