

“Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man,” says Peter. Paul said something similar: “For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” Then there’s Isaiah: “Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

Do you see the pattern here? None of these people to whom the Lord comes considers himself worthy! They’re all being called, but none of them thinks he can do what the Lord wants: “Oh, no! You can’t mean me! There are much better people than me you could choose!”

The Lord didn’t buy any of their excuses. Even though Peter was a sinful man, Jesus still wanted him, along with James and John, to “be catching men.” Paul had persecuted the church of God, but God gave him the grace to be what he was. He called himself “the least of the apostles,” but later generations would call him “The Apostle.” Isaiah was a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips, but the Lord saw to it his lips were cleansed, his wickedness removed, his sin purged!

That’s the other part of the pattern. None of these people thought they were worthy, and they weren’t, but the Lord accepted them anyway. Actually, I almost said “the Lord didn’t care,” meaning he didn’t care that they were unworthy but, I think he did. And I think there’s an important reason that he cared about them being unworthy.

To be unworthy before the Lord means not to be what He meant us to be. It’s like taking what he’s given to each and every one of us, to help us be what he wanted us to be, and throwing it back in his face or, since probably most of us aren’t all that aggressive about it, maybe it was more like saying “Thank you, Lord” because it’s the polite thing to say, taking the gift, without really receiving it and tossing it into the back of the closet never to be thought of again. And we never got to be what the Lord meant for us to be.

Now, when I speak of what the Lord wants us to be, I don’t mean it in the same way as when we ask someone “What do you want to be when you grow up.” I’m not talking about whether God wants us to become a butcher, a baker or a candlestick maker. What we do for a living can well be a part of what the Lord wants us to be, but His call goes deeper than that. Even if we are called to be a priest or deacon or to enter into religious life, God’s call is not just answered by entering into that state of life, it also has to do with the way we live that life.

Lent is almost upon us. It’s early this year, but it comes every year as our time to focus on prayer, fasting and almsgiving. But these things are not to be thought of as valuable in themselves, these things are means to an end. They can help us be more ready to be what God made us to be.

Think of it this way: no matter who you are, no matter what you’ve done, whether it be good stuff or bad stuff, you’ve got powers you don’t know about! Powers for the good. You’ve got abilities you haven’t even used . . . yet!

The Lord gave them to you. They are waiting for you still. Or maybe you never even noticed Lord standing there with them, holding them out to you, standing there still, still waiting, still loving you, still ready to help you become who you are. Or maybe you have been taking him up on his offers. He's still there! He's happy with what you've managed with the gifts He's given you so far but He's saying "Here, try this one too."

Maybe, this Lent, you can use some extra time in prayer to find out what he wants you to do. You might find the Adoration Chapel a good place to do that. Maybe you can approach the fasting, the giving things up, as an exercise to strengthen you in doing things the Lord's way, and doing them for the Lord. Maybe you can practice almsgiving, any acts of kindness and generosity, to build up your ability to love.

Yes, we are sinful men, sinful women, sinful teens, and sinful children but that doesn't define us. That's not all the Lord sees in us. Let's not be asking the Lord to depart from us because of our sinfulness, He's got something he wants to give us! Let's stay with him in prayer and reconciliation, let's give ourselves to him through fasting, let's become more what he wanted us to be through the good we do for others.

He's got what we need to become what we were meant to be. And that, my friends, is what we deeply want to be.