

of the first things you do is to remember the Ten Commandments, then think of all the times you have broken them and then have to say “sorry.”

Our two readings today bear out this sense of human inferiority in the presence of God. Isaiah is in the temple when he sees a vision of God in all his glory.

“*Woe is me,*” he cries, “*I am unworthy and I live amongst people who are unworthy. How can I bear to look on the face of God?*”

Peter has been out fishing and Jesus has performed a miracle right there on his boat. Peter realises that this is someone with divine power.

“*Get away from me, Lord,*” he says, “*I am a sinful man. I am not fit for you to associate with.*”

The presence of God fills both men with this overwhelming sense of their own inadequacy and neither of them can cope with it.

Let’s be honest, we none of us enjoy being made to feel inferior. It is not a pleasant sensation. We do not find it easy being in the company of people whom, we feel, are belittling us.

And we cope either by becoming confrontational: *who do you think you are?*

Or-like Isaiah and Peter- by trying to get away from them as fast as possible.

Or, if we cannot get away (because they are our boss or our mother in law) we simply slide into the unfortunate habit of sniping at everybody else in our lives because we have to take it out on someone.

The same can be said of God. A lot of people have got into the habit either of being confrontational with God: *who do you think you are? Life is hell. The world is a mess and what gives you the right to tell me what to do?*

Or of avoiding God and avoiding anything which might suggest God- like church.

Or –and this is what tends to happen more within the church-of taking it out on everybody else. Quarrels and misunderstandings in a congregation, spiritual bullying, where you either frighten or nag others into faith, apathy, grumblings, unfriendliness toward strangers- a lot of this stems from a deep-rooted sense of our own inferiority.
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Going back to those cartoons though, the point Posy Simmonds was making was that neither of those women was actually setting out to make the other feel inadequate. Neither honestly thought the other inferior. Their problems arose from what was going on inside them. Rose enjoyed being at home looking after her children but there were times when she missed the stimulation of adult company, of work outside the home. Sarah enjoyed being a working mother but there were times when she missed her baby, when she wanted to give more time to him. Both were victims of a culture which sends out contradictory messages to women: working mothers are selfish and greedy; home-making mothers are lazy and incompetent; both were victims of a society in which you either have to work a fifteen hour day or not at all and neither was finding it easy to cope. The sad thing is that, without those feelings of inferiority and the resentment this was creating, they might have been able to help each other.

Going back to the two stories we heard from the Bible, did you hear anything at all which suggested that God was trying to make Isaiah feel inferior? Did you hear anything at all which suggested that Jesus was trying to make Peter feel inferior?

I did not. The problems were far more about what was going on inside those two men.

messages we shall ever hear, bringing comfort to people in exile and hope to those who would return and rebuild their nation.

Both Peter and Isaiah were able to shake off their feelings of inferiority, reach out, shake hands with God and build up a relationship of love, of confidence and of co-operation which was to last throughout their lifetimes and have a powerful effect on their world.

Epiphany: seeing something of God in our world and in our lives. Our stories today show just what a liberating and joyful experience that can be. Life can be so very hard and we become so very frustrated with it all. The last thing we need is someone superior telling us what a mess we are making- we know that already.

But here is a greater power reaching out in love and saying "*let's do this together.*" That is the God of the Bible. That is the God we see in Jesus. That is the God whose Spirit is with us and around us and filling this place today.

So, as Saint Augustine said, what can we do but *sing alleluia and start moving.*

I'd like to finish with the words of a prayer by Brother Roger of the Taize community: *O Christ, in every creature you place a word: God's forgiveness and his confidence in us. To walk in your footsteps you offer us the energy always to begin anew.*

Following you through the humble events of every day means discerning a way- not a law burdening us with obligations, but you, O Christ, you are the way and on this road God comes to meet us.

Amen.