

14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B/2006

God has a plan of salvation for our world. To realize this plan he uses human beings as his messengers. Thus some have received the mission and the vocation to be prophets. The content of all today's readings is about that mission and the difficulties linked to it. The 1st reading narrates the mission given to the prophet Ezekiel. Because the mission is one of the most difficult, God fills Ezekiel with his spirit. In fact, the people to whom he is sent are rebellious and stubborn like their ancestors. They are not faithful; they are hard of face and obstinate of heart. Consequently, the prophet cannot expect an easy task or success; what he should do is just to fulfill his duty. He has no choice; he should talk and discharge his mission without hesitation. Hence, the insistence: "Whether they heed or resist, they shall know that a prophet has been among them". In other words, the prophet is not asked to work miracles, to foretell the future, or to do strange things. God expects him to do just one thing, namely to broadcast his word and to be the channel he uses to communicate his message to his people.

From the point of view of those who listen to the prophet, they should take position vis-à-vis his message. Because he speaks on behalf of God, by accepting or rejecting his message, the listeners decide for their salvation or their condemnation. It is the same message we find in today's Gospel as Jesus is confronted with the unbelief of the people of his own family. One would say that things have not changed since their ancestors. But why is it so difficult for the people of Jesus' village to accept him and his message? The main reason is their perception of God. In fact, all the devout Jews were convinced that when the Messiah comes, he resembles the almighty and powerful God who sends him.

With such idea in mind, there was little chance that the people of Nazareth could accept Jesus insofar as he was well known in the village as "carpenter, the son and Mary" and whose relatives were still living in the village. How could it be possible that this maker of windows and doors would come from God? On the other hand, they could not deny the fact that this young man did perform prodigies and wonders like "the men of God" of ancient times. Here lie their astonishment and scandal. In other words, there was a contradiction between the religious principles they thought indisputable and the teaching of Jesus whose behavior contradicted them.

The mistake of the people of Nazareth was to believe that God couldn't use human beings like Jesus to talk to his people. And yet God accomplishes extraordinary deeds by using what people despise and consider valueless. Moreover, even if touched by the message of Jesus, the villagers of Nazareth could not, however, change their way of thinking. They hold on even more stubbornly to their own ideas and refuse to listen to the one sent to save them. Such a mistake can be also repeated in nowadays, in our communities. How many people have problem with the sacrament of confession for the simple reason that, considering the priest as a human being like them, they do not see how he could be able to forgive their sins?

The understanding of the readings as I presented above invites us to some points of meditation I would like to share with you. The first is about the sense of history of salvation: the history of salvation is a long account of two series of facts, on the hand, God's mercies and graces toward his people and, on the other hand, infidelities and refusal of these benefits from his people. In fact, God has done a lot for Israel, but his

people have been very often unfaithful to him. This reflection on the history of salvation is an invitation to each one of us to return to our own history. How many blessings from God we have received in our lives? But how often have we been unfaithful to God and have not fulfilled our promises before him? If we are sincere with ourselves, we can like St Augustine, each one in his turn, write our Confession by acknowledging God's graces in our lives and our continual denial of his bounty.

The second point of meditation is about the fate of a prophet. Every person who lives in truth participates to the destiny of the prophet. Every baptized person has a prophetic vocation, that is, being called to announce Jesus Christ and his Gospel to our brothers and sisters, each one according to his vocation and each one starting with his own family and circle of life. In order to be able to do so, one must listen carefully to the word of God, to let it penetrate his heart and transform it. Nobody can give to others what he does not possess. Consequently, without being rich in the word of Jesus and being transformed by it, we will hardly bring it to others and transform them.

The third point is about the duty of the prophet. To be a prophet is an austere and harsh job, not only because he is a fragile human being, but also because there is no guarantee that the people to whom he is sent will listen to him. However, the prophet should do his job as required by his master, not seeking to please himself. If he listens more himself than his boss, Jesus, he will jeopardize his job. On the other hand, if in spite of everything he has done, the result does not follow, the prophet should refer only to God who has given him this job. In other words, the recompense of the prophet is not in the success of his apostolate, but in God.

As a matter of fact, these last days, people talk a lot about the shortage of priest, the sex scandal by priests and even about diminution of Christian practice, etc. To remedy such a situation, some propose the marriage of priests or the ordination of women or married couples. Some others accuse the teaching of the Church as being too close to modern culture, etc. But my question is this: who can teach better than Jesus? Who can do better his job than Jesus? And yet before his own people, Jesus failed to convert them. The powerlessness of Jesus in face of the unbelief of his compatriots manifests his infinite respect of human freedom. God wants our salvation; but he will never force us to believe in him. If we do not do something for our salvation, nothing will happen to us. Miracles happen only to those who open themselves to God.

Finally, this statement allows me to talk about the importance of the spirituality of failure. Because the success of our apostolate is not guaranteed, why should we be discouraged? Let us start again; let us rely on God. Let me repeat these wonderful words of St Paul: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness"*. Where we have failed, we should have the courage to recognize that our performance has been below expectation. There is no shame to recognize one's limits and to start again. May God bless each one of us and help us to rely on him in every thing we do.



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