

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of mission of the servant of the Lord and the difficulties related to it. The first reading talks about the vocation of the prophet Ezekiel. In fact, God called him, filled him with his Spirit, and sent him into mission to the house of Israel. The text qualifies the house of Israel as rebels and who had revolted against God. Though, they had an obstinate heart and a hard face, Ezekiel has to fulfill his duty toward them whether they accept it or not.

What is behind this text is the idea that the people of God have not always been faithful and obedient to God. However, God loved them by seeking always to renew his alliance with them through the work of the prophets. The text tells us also something about the task of a prophet, which is not easy. As difficult as that mission might be, however, the prophet has to fulfill it without failure.

This text helps to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus is rejected by the people of his village. First of all, the Gospel says that Jesus and his disciples came to his native land and went to the synagogue where he started teaching.

As he did, people were astonished because they knew him and his family very well. For that reason, they took offense at him and hardly believed in him. Because of that, Jesus did not perform any mighty deeds among them except curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them. Eventually, Jesus realized that a prophet is without honor except in his native place and among his own kin.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing is about the misfortune of closing one's heart to the truth. It is so striking that people from the village of Jesus could not welcome him. And yet, when a town has someone famous, like a great football player, a movie star, or an important politician, people make of him/her a hero and a raw model for their village.

That is not the case with Jesus in this Gospel. The people of his village instead simply rejected him. They did so because they put the value of a person in his familial background and pedigree. The truth, however, is that what we are cannot be measured only by our familial heritage. We might come from a modest family or a poor background, but we can be bearers of great ideas. The history of the world has proven that in many ways. The worth of a person does not depend on his family, but on what someone is capable of bringing to others.

Moreover, good family does not necessarily mean good descendent. Again, human history has proven it to be true. If that is the case, then, the problem of the people of the village of Jesus comes from the closing of their hearts to God's grace manifested in Jesus Christ. They were wrong to believe that God cannot be present in Jesus. In fact, Jesus is not only the son of Mary and Joseph, he is foremost the son of God. The wisdom and might he brings in his teachings are not human, but rather divine.

With all that in mind, it is absolutely clear that Jesus could not perform miracles in their midst. That is why we have always to remember that people cannot be healed when they do not want to be healed. Moreover, there cannot be a real preaching in a wrong atmosphere. However, in an atmosphere of expectation even the poorest effort can catch fire, while in an atmosphere of indifference even a very filled spirit can fall lifeless.

The openness of heart to God's grace is a matter of death or life when it comes to our eternal salvation.

The second point I want to highlight is about the task of the prophet. As a matter of fact, being a prophet is a very difficult task, not only because the prophet is a fragile human being, but also because there is no guarantee that the people to whom he is sent will listen all the time to him.

In spite of all that, however, the prophet has the duty to speak in the name of God in time and out of time, whether people listen to him or not. If, then, in spite of everything he can do in order to fulfill his mission nothing works, the prophet should not be discouraged. After all, the recompense of his job is not in the human success he can have, but in God who has given him that job. It is God who will sooner or later reward him.

What I am saying here is very important nowadays because of the culture in which we live. As a matter of fact, these days we hear people talk a lot about the shortage of priests, the abuse by the priests, and even about the diminution of Christian practice.

In order to remedy such a situation, some propose the marriage of priests, the ordination of women or of married couples, etc. Others accuse the Church of having become too modern by adapting its teaching to the culture of this time. Some others propose the rejection of the Second Vatican Council and the return to Vatican I, etc.

I certainly try to understand these opinions and to do justice to them. I understand that they have been generated by the crisis the Church is going through and the apparent failure in which the Church is involved nowadays. However, there is a question I cannot help asking: Who can teach better than Jesus? Who can do his job better than Jesus? And yet, according to today's Gospel, Jesus failed to convert the people of his village. His powerlessness to convert them is a sign of God's respect of human freedom. Of course, God wants our salvation; but he will never force us to believe in him. He lets us free to choose life or death. It is not miracles that change people, but a simple faith-trust in God and his word.

I believe that it is time that we integrate in our spirituality the reality of failure. What I am saying is not that we should be complacent about our duty, but the truth that, in spite of our good will, it can happen that we fail in our duty. Therefore, we should not be discouraged, but instead we have to try again and again, according to our skills and abilities, counting on God's grace. We have to start again, even if the result is not evident. That is what St Paul has done in his ministry as he witnesses here about what the Lord told him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness". That should be our prayer before God that he may help us to count on him in everything we do. May God bless you all!

Ezekiel 2: 2-5; 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10; Mark 6: 1-6



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