

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2015

All the readings of this Sunday talk about the mission of the servant of God. They show that he is sent to the people who are not always ready to cooperate and welcome his message. They invite us to pray for the force of the Holy Spirit so that we come to fulfill our mission according to God's will.

The first reading talks about the vocation of the prophet Ezekiel. It shows how God called him, filled him with his spirit and sent him to the sons of Israel. It shows also how, like their ancestors, the sons of Israel have always been rebels against God. Finally, the text invites the prophet to fulfill his duty regardless of whether or not he is being heard.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel that speaks of Jesus' presence in the synagogue of his native village. First of all, the Gospel mentions the presence of Jesus with his disciples on the Sabbath in the synagogue of his village. It also mentions the astonishment of the people at his teaching.

After that, the Gospel shows how the people took offense at Jesus and question his origins. Finally, the Gospel shows that because of their lack of faith, Jesus did not perform any miracle in that place except laying hands on the sick.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the task of a prophet. First of all, who is a prophet? A prophet is a person sent by God in order to talk to people on his behalf, delivering them his message and serving as an intermediary between him and them.

If I could use a comparison, I would say that a prophet is like an ambassador whose role is to represent his country and his government. Like an ambassador who is not advancing and defending his personal opinions on issues, the prophet has to communicate the message he has received from God, be it joyful or sorrowful.

The message that the prophet is bringing depends on the circumstances of time, place, context and the persons to whom it is intended. In the first reading we see that the people to whom the prophet is sent are called a rebellious house which does not care about God's laws. However, in spite of all that, the prophet has to speak and say what he has to say even if he runs the risk of provoking anger and negative reactions of his listeners.

In the Gospel, Jesus who is also a prophet, is rejected, but, ironically, by the people of his village. They did so because they put the value of a person in his familial background and pedigree. The truth, however, is that we 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 descent. 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, we understand 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.

However, though the task of the prophet is difficult, he has 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 and 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 inside the Church. 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 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 an invitation to complacency about our duty, but the truth that, in spite of our good will, it can happen that we fail. Therefore, we should not be discouraged, but instead try again and again until success comes. We have to start again, even if the result is not evident. Let us pray, then, asking the Lord to give us the courage to fulfill our duty in spite of human failures. May God bless you all!

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



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