

## Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B2018

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's servant mission and its difficulties. They invite us to perseverance in time of difficulties and even in the midst of evident failures.

The first reading talks about the vocation of the prophet Ezekiel. It shows how God called him and gave him a difficult mission to fulfill toward the house of Israel. Finally, it shows how the prophet did not have any alternative than to execute his duty.

What is behind this text is the truth that Israel has not always been faithful to God. There is also the expression of the mercy of God who continually looks to win back his people. The last idea is related to the truth that, as difficult as the task of God's servant might be, he has to fulfill it at any cost.

This text helps to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus is rejected by the people of his village. The Gospel starts with the journey of Jesus and his disciples to Nazareth, his home town. Then, it talks about his teaching in the Synagogue and the admiration he provoked among the people. The Gospel shows equally the rejection of the people who did not believe in him. Finally, the Gospel relates the reaction of Jesus who did not perform any miracle in their midst because of their lack of faith.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the mission of the servant of God and its difficulties. In fact, it is striking to realize that in today's Gospel the people from Jesus' home town took offense at him and did not believe at all in him. And yet, we know by experience that when a town has someone famous, like a great football player, a movie star, or a politician, people make of him a hero and a raw model for their village.

Unlike what we would expect in similar circumstances, the people of Jesus' home town simply rejected him. They did so because they put the value of a person in his family background. But, how wrong they were, because what a person is cannot be measured only by his family heritage. Someone might come from a modest family or a poor background, but he can be a bearer of great ideas. The history of the world has proven that to be true in many ways.

In other words, the worth of a person does not depend on his family, but on what he is capable of bringing to others. Moreover, good family does not necessarily mean good descent. Again, human history has proven it to be true. We have also to remember that sometimes prejudices can prevent us from knowing people as they are. If the people of Jesus' home town had a favorable opinion of him, they would have discovered that there was more in him than what they thought to know. Prejudices and bad opinions can really distort the reality.

Here is the question: What was the origin of the problem of the people of Jesus' town? They closed their hearts and minds to God's grace manifested in Jesus. 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 and hostility 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.

Jesus' troubles in his home town are a symbol of the difficulties of the mission of the Church throughout the world. Sometimes the Church has to labor in a hostile environment where priest and nuns are killed. What is required of God's servant in such conditions is the courage to keep speaking in the name of God in time and out of time, whether people listen to him or not.

If, in spite of all his effort, nothing works, the servant of God should not be discouraged. After all, the recompense of his ministry is not in the human success he can have, but in God who has given him that duty. It is God who will sooner or later reward him.

What I am saying here is important today more than ever. As a matter of fact, these days, people talk a lot about the shortage of 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 the times. Some others propose the rejection of Vatican II and the return to Vatican I, etc.

I certainly understand those opinions and try to do justice to them. I know that they are generated by the crisis the Church is going through. But, what I do not understand is the speculation about the priesthood as though it was a job, like any other. No; it is a vocation; meaning that some are called by God for it and others are not. Moreover, if the Church was a human endeavor, it would have died. As it is God's work, it will survive any crisis.

There is more. When I see how in today's Gospel Jesus failed to convert the people of his home town, then, I say, we all need to be humble. We have to recognize that in spite of all our good will to make things work and all our effort to improve and adapt our methods of evangelization, it can happen that we fail in our endeavors.

Jesus' powerlessness to convert the people of his home town 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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