

## Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B2024

Let me start this homily with an anecdote. One time I was visiting a relative in the East of Italy, along the Adriatic Sea, in the region of Ancona. As we were driving around from where my nephew was living, we came up to a neighboring village. At the center of the village, there was a beautiful monument surrounded with flowers, dedicated to a certain Roberto Mancini who was a former coach of Italian soccer Team.

My question to my nephew and his friends was to know why it was important to dedicate a monument to that man. Their answer was: he was important for the village. He represented the achievement of the sons and daughters of the village who were capable of rising to such a prominence at the national level. For them, Mancini was a hero and a role model for many Young in the village.

What I heard led me to make a direct connection to the Gospel of Jesus in his native place. I could see the contrast between that man and our Lord, a contrast that teaches us a lot, how people give more value to the things of this world than they do for the things of God.

The people of Nazareth rejected our Lord because they saw him as an ordinary man whose family and relatives they knew very well. To their judgement, the value of a person was determined by his familial background and pedigree. They did not see any achievement in him that could push them to appreciate him.

The truth, however, is that what we are cannot be measured only by our family 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 to be true 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, a good family does not necessarily mean good descent. That being said, the big problem of the people of Nazareth came from the closing of their hearts to God's grace manifested in our Lord. They were wrong to believe that God could not be present in Jesus. Our Lord was not only the son of Mary and Joseph; he was above all the son of God. The wisdom and might he brought in his teaching and actions were not human, but rather divine.

The mistake of the people of Nazareth was to believe that God couldn't use someone like our Lord to talk to them. And yet God accomplishes extraordinary deeds by using what people despise and consider valueless. For sure the inhabitants of Nazareth were touched by the wisdom and the teaching of our Lord. Even though, they did not change their mind about him. They held on even more stubbornly to their own ideas and refused to listen to the one sent to save them.

Such a mistake can be repeated even today. 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 capable of forgiving their sins?

Those difficulties of our Lord in his native place bring to light the mission of the prophet and its demands. As the first reading reveals, to be a prophet, as it was for Ezequiel, is a difficult task. There is no guarantee that the people to whom the prophet is sent will listen to him.

However, the prophet should do his duty as required by God, not seeking to please himself. If he listens more to himself than our Lord, he will jeopardize his job. If in spite of everything he could do in his job, the result does not follow, he should refer only to God who gave him that task. In other words, the prophet's recompense lies more in his fidelity to God and his mission than in the human success of his apostolate.

Such a vision has to lead us to temper negative views some people have when the work of the Church does not go as expected. For instance, these last days, people talk about the shortage of priest, the sex scandal and even the diminution of Christian practice. As a solution, some propose extreme things like marriage of priests, ordination of women or married couples, etc. Others accuse the Church of having become too liberal. Some others propose even the return to Vatican I instead of Vatican II.

Those concerns are legitimate and should not be dismissed without any serious examination. However, I have some questions: Who can teach better than our Lord Jesus? Who can do better his job than our Lord himself? And yet before his own people, our Lord failed to convert them. His powerlessness in face of the unbelief of his compatriots manifests his infinite respect of human freedom.

For sure, God wants our salvation; but he will never force us to believe in him. As St Augustin once said, "God has created us without us. But, we will not save us without us." Our cooperation to the work of salvation is very important. If we do not do something for our salvation, nothing will happen to us. Miracles happen only to those who open up themselves to God.

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 in our duty. We have to recognize the truth that, in spite of our good will, it can happen that we fail in our duty. Therefore, we should not be discouraged. 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 in the second reading about what our Lord told him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness". That should be our prayer before God so that he may help us to count more on him than on ourselves.

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



Homily Date: July 07, 2024  
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Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)  
Document Name: 20240707homily.pdf.