

14th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – B

Ez. 2:2-5; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Mk. 6:1-6

Excerpt from Pope Francis – Angelus from 08 July 2018

by Father Charles Fillion

04 July 2021

Brothers and sisters, from what we gather from today's Gospel, this is the first time that Jesus returns to Nazareth and begins to teach in the synagogue on a Saturday. Ever since he had left it and begun preaching in the nearby villages, he had never again set foot in his country. Now, He has returned.

It is like a hockey player, a homegrown singer song writer, or a well-known actor coming back home. Everybody is happy to see and want to have an autograph. Is Jesus welcomed in the same manner?

It seems that the whole town must have been there to listen to this son of theirs, whose fame as a wise master and powerful healer had by now spread throughout Galilee and beyond. But what could have stood out as a success, turned into a resounding rejection, to such an extent that Jesus could not perform any mighty work but only a few healings. The dynamics of that day are reconstructed in detail by Mark, the Evangelist: At first the people of Nazareth listen [to him] and are astonished; then perplexed, they ask themselves “Where did this man get all this?”, this wisdom? And in the end, they take offence, recognizing him as the carpenter, Mary's son whom they had seen grow up. Jesus sums it up with the expression which has become clichéd: “A prophet is not without honour, except in his hometown”.

We may ask ourselves: why do Jesus' fellow townsmen go from astonishment to disbelief? They make a comparison between Jesus' humble origins and his current abilities: he is a carpenter; he did not study and yet he preaches better than the scribes and he perform miracles. And instead of opening up to the reality, they take offence. According to the people of Nazareth, God is too great to humble himself to speak through such a simple man! It is the scandal of the Incarnation: the unsettling event of a God made flesh who thinks with the mind of a man, works and acts with the hands of a man, loves with a human heart, a God who struggles, eats and sleeps like one of us. The Son of God overturns every human framework: it is not the disciples who washed the feet of the Lord, but it is the Lord who washed the feet of the disciples. This is a reason for scandal and scepticism, not only in that period, but in all ages, even today.

The radical change Jesus brought about commits his disciples of both yesterday and today to a personal and community [self] examination. Indeed, even in our day it can happen that we harbour some prejudices that prevent us from seeing reality. But, today, the Lord asks us to adopt an attitude of humble listening and docile expectation because God's grace often manifests itself in surprising ways that do not match our expectations.

There are so many examples in our Christian history. How many times did God deliver his message using people with no instruction, or without prestige? Let us think about Mother Teresa of Calcutta, for example. A tiny sister — no one took her very seriously — who went around the streets to gather up the dying so that they could have a dignified death. With prayer and her work, this tiny sister performed wonders! A small woman revolutionized charity work in the Church. She sets an example for our times. God does not conform to human prejudices. We must make an effort to open our heart and mind to welcome the divine reality which comes to encounter us.

Three years ago, on July 8, 2018, in his Angelus message, Pope Francis addressed this Gospel saying: It is a case of having faith: lack of faith is an obstacle to God's grace. Many people who have been baptized live as though Christ did not exist. They repeat the gestures and the signs of faith but these do not correspond to a true bond with the person of Jesus and his Gospel. Each Christian — all of us, each of us — is called to deepen this fundamental belonging, and try to bear witness to it with a consistent conduct in life, always motivated by charity.

Brothers and sisters, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, let us ask the Lord to melt the hardness of hearts and the narrowness of minds so that we can be open to his grace, to his truth and to his mission of goodness and mercy which is addressed to all, with no exception.