

Homily for the Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 2021 Year B

There is an old but true saying, “there is none so blind that cannot see, “or worse still “will not see”.

That was the problem with the people of Nazareth in today’s Gospel. Christ’s family origins were too well known amongst the villagers. He was one of them. So how could anything good come out of Nazareth? Because He was a native, they thought He had nothing to offer. They knew Him too well to be able to recognise the divine, the presence of God in their village.

That is often our problem as well. All too often we turn our backs on the local prophet who is the presence of God in our midst.

Life in many ways is about searching for God, but how often do we make the mistake of looking for Him in the far-off hills, obscure places or in something that is spectacular. We blithely forget the obvious, that God moves in subtle and mysterious ways, and is most likely to be present in our nearest and dearest or in our neighbours.

God is present to us in the ordinary bits and pieces of life and shows up more often than we think.

He is not apart from the world, nor is He confined or controlled by religion, ritual or language. We meet him in every person, place and moment that comes our way.

The trouble with us is that because we stand so close to each other, we only see the faults and flaws. We take for granted the great gifts of goodness that we all possess.

It is so easy to become a community of knockers and begrudgers. We allow ourselves to be blinded by jealousy and family prejudice. The Gospel asks us to turn all this around and open up our eyes and give honour and recognition to the prophets of God's goodness in our surroundings.

For example, take a fresh look at the person you married. The passing years and over-familiarity have probably dulled your awareness of the beauty of God's goodness in that person. You take for granted the honesty, integrity, fidelity, and hard work of that person. You just do not think of him or her as God’s shining presence to you in what can sometimes be a dark world.

The same is true for the meals-on-wheels lady, the class teacher, your doctor, your local policeman, the lady at the checkout till in the supermarket where you shop, your neighbour over the garden fence, and so on.

Most people are socially reserved, shy, and value privacy. They erect barriers to preserve the distance that they are comfortable with. We respect that distance and only see what they want us to see. Because of this the shining presence of God and God's goodness in that person often escapes our notice completely.

Now the Gospel tells us that Christ could not work any miracles there. Not would not, but could not. That is very puzzling. It seems that their lack of faith inhibited the power of God's goodness and would not let it be shown to its full effect.

It is God's way with things that Faith must be a free assent not something coerced out of us by the wonderful and the miraculous. Christ worked miracles where there was Faith in Him, not to cause faith in Him.

Now in a strange sort of way, when we are blind to the presence of God and God's goodness in that other person there before us, and when we are only too conscious of their flaws or their humanity, we inhibit or block that goodness from having its wonderful effect upon us. It is as though it is trapped, it cannot escape. It is diluted by the plain ordinariness of the person before us. It is our task to open our eyes a little bit more and penetrate the layers of ordinariness and flawed humanity in people close to us. We need to catch sight of the presence of God and God's goodness in that person, release it and celebrate it.

When God's presence is allowed to shine out at least two things can happen.

Firstly, a deep respect for the humanity in that particular person's life and identity should be engendered, a small miracle desperately needed in the world today when life can be held so cheap. As Saint Paul says, "we are all temples of the Holy Spirit". If what dwells within us is Holy, then what it dwells in is Holy and Sacred too.

Secondly, in what is often a dark, pessimistic, and depressing world, enormous hope and optimism can be generated if we can see the goodness that surrounds us. We may have to dig deep to see it, but it is there. Once we are

aware of it, the miracle of the strength to pick ourselves up and carry on is performed. We are not alone.

So, every now and then make an act of Faith in the presence of God and the goodness of God in other people. When that goodness slowly reveals itself to us then the miracle can be performed.