

Fr James' homily for the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2021



First Reading: Prophecy of Ezekiel 2:2-5
Second Reading: Second Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians 12: 7-10
Gospel: Mark 6: 1-6

As we continue with the reading of the Gospel of St Mark we come to the poignant events of Jesus' return to Nazareth and the familiar words "a prophet is only despised...in his own home." Immediately these words are depressing, hinting at confrontation and failure as the lot of the prophet. Well, there is a call to realistic about the life of a disciple, certainly. More importantly, though, these familiar words lead all our scriptures for today to speak to us of the "home" that is our relationship with Jesus.

God the Holy Spirit works to bring us closer to God, Father and Son, to know and trust them. So the Spirit calls the Prophet Ezekiel to stand up, so that he can hear God. As we listen to the scriptures today, let us ask God the Holy Spirit to remind us that everyone who has received the grace of Baptism is called too to be a prophet, to speak of God's ways to themselves and to all others, and knowing this to be filled with joy. Standing up is first the attitude of worship. It is also the attitude of attention, of listening, and it is the attitude of action. Worship makes us who we are made to be. Listening opens us to being formed in God's ways. Then it is our own uniqueness and individuality which God calls to go out and speak. "Whether they listen or not...(they)shall know there is a prophet among them." People want to see integrity, even if they don't like what they see!

What counts for Ezekiel is the bond that the Spirit makes between him and God. St Paul too today gives intimate witness to the action of the Holy Spirit guiding him to rely only on Jesus. He prays for healing (*remember last week's Gospel*) but he doesn't get it. He gets something more valuable, a profound sense of "home" in Jesus. He tells us that this prevents him from drowning out God's voice with his own well-meaning opinions. This act of grace makes him truly a prophet.

So we come to those who already have a relationship with Jesus - the people of Nazareth. They seem to think that they know him through and through. They are prepared to acknowledge his impressive teaching and miracles, but they are prevented, by pride maybe, from joining the dots and see that God is present here among them. It is all very well to admire Jesus as a fine teacher, even a prophet, but unless we allow him to make his home in us truly, he cannot work the true miracle of grace in us.

Next Sunday we learn that after this failure Jesus simply carries on doing what he is doing and calls others to do the same. Two things are very clear:

First, everything depends on our faithful trust in Jesus, in always being open to him and so we should stand and worship and listen and welcome the grace of the Spirit to build in us trust like that of St Paul.

Secondly, as St Paul says, the life of the disciple we must realise faces constant challenge. We are sent “to our own people” who are “those who have rebelled”. Let’s be wise enough to realise that this is true first of ourselves. We always want to listen to our own voice and go our own way rather than listen to Jesus. To realise that is the first step to being able to witness meaningfully to the people and culture around us and respond creatively to their inevitable defensive or hostile opposition.

St Theresa of Calcutta famously said that God does not call us to be successful. He calls us to be faithful. Living with that integrity is what makes us prophets. The rest is God’s business. Let’s end today with the wonderful glimpse St Paul gives us into his friendship with the risen Jesus, who says to him: ***“My grace is enough for you: my power is at its best in weakness.”***

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch.