

Homily - 14th Sunday Ordinary, July 3-4, 2021

Prophets.

In our First Reading today, Ezekiel recounts that God sends him forth, saying, “And whether they heed or resist — for they are a rebellious house — they shall know that a prophet has been among them.”

Note that comment regarding the people: whether they agree with the message Ezekiel gives or not, whether they like the message or not, whether they listen or not, whether they follow or not – they will know that a prophet has been among them.

In Our Gospel today, Our Lord enters a town; and the people – God’s people, Christ’s people - seem to not know that a prophet is with them.

Dominican Brother James Pierce Cavanaugh summarizes one of the links between our First Reading and Gospel Reading today. He says:

“So two figures: Ezekiel; little, aware of his littleness, but brave enough to do what he’s sent to do; and Jesus: great, mighty, but who comes down to our level and is brave enough to accept rejection.”

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The Gospel Reading follows immediately after the gospel we read last week. Jesus has just cured the woman with the twelve-year hemorrhage and raised from the dead the twelve-year-old girl. He now goes to His home town – which would be Nazareth. And of all the places He has gone so far, those who know Him are the ones who reject Him.

We are told “And they took offense at him.”

The word used in Greek comes from the words for a stone which someone trips over. The people who grew up with Jesus found Him to be a problem.

And we are told why – it is because they knew him.

In that sense, it seems that the reports of what Jesus had done elsewhere, and how He was teaching now, did not fit with their expectations of someone as ordinary as they knew Him to be.

We are told that, “So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there.”

Most commentators I have read suggest this phrase was not meant to describe that Jesus’ miracles only depended on other’s faith. He can do anything, He is God. Quite often, His miracles are what elicits faith.

The implication of this event is that the people could not get past their expectations. As one commentary on the Gospel of Mark puts it, “...where there is no openness to the power of God...or where that power becomes a stumbling block to preconceptions [-] the “mighty work” as an invitation to deeper faith and discipleship cannot take place.” “Jesus still retains the power to do mighty works in the face of disbelief. What he cannot do is compel acceptance.”

It is still true today. If we cannot see the miraculous in the everyday, or accept the ubiquitous God as being present in the bombastic and brilliant, we cannot then be moved by either the everyday or the spectacular.

In contrast, that can be compared to those times we see miracles every minute of every day as well as supernatural occurrences. These works of God in the ordinary and the seeming coincidental allow us to know the closeness and love of Our Lord.

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As the people object to Jesus because they know Him, one of the lines in Mark is that they know His family, and mention sisters, and even name some brothers. This is a line that catch the ears of people at different points in their lives. The question is asked, “who are these brothers and sisters?”

The question has been a contentious one since the Protestant Reformation. For instance, it is brought up as an argument to prove or disprove Our Blessed Mother’s Perpetual Virginity.

Several years ago, a group of Protestant and Catholic Scholars published a book on the issue. Using the most rigorist biblical scholarship methods of the time, they looked at the issue of James and Joses and Judas and Simon being called the

brothers of Jesus. Their conclusion was that, using Scripture alone, the case cannot be determined definitively.

From the Catholic perspective, we do not rely on the bible alone, but on Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition together.

Of the many biblical arguments that James and Joses and Judas and Simon are not sons of Our Blessed Mother, I will mention two quickly.

The first is that calling a close relative a brother or sister even if they are not the child of one's own mother or father is witnessed to in different parts of the bible.

The second is that upon examination, these brothers who are named are also associated in the New Testament with other families. Within Mark's gospel itself, in Chapter fifteen, of women present at Our Lord's crucifixion is identified a "Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses."

This is a topic that many find fascinating and necessary to pursue, especially when it is brought up as a challenge to our faith.

In the context of the passage, it can get us away from centering upon Jesus; just as the people of Nazareth let their familiarity with Our Lord's family distract them to the invitation He gave them through His divine wisdom and mighty works.

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Next week, we pick up from this event as Christ sends the twelve out two-by-two.

This sums up our situation. Whatever our reaction to the Scriptures today, we are sent out as well, at the end of Mass. We are sent out to bring Christ to the world. May our time here today be one of letting Him be close to us, and empower us, to bring His life and love to those in need.