

Homily for the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 7-8, 2018

Readings: Ezechiel 2: 2-5; 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10; Mark: 6: 1-6

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Over the last few Sundays, our readings have reminded us about how prophets challenge laid-back, complacent, self-satisfied thinking. Today, Jesus, God's beloved Son, who stands in this same prophetic tradition, is rejected in his native place. Such rejection, we know, will culminate in total abandonment by family, friends, disciples, religious leaders. There will be exceptions, of course, but for the most part, as he is lifted up on the cross, few who have known him will be there.

We read today how the folks back home are ready to judge him on the basis of his personal history, occupation, educational background, parentage, family members and birthplace. Their minds are made up. Jesus can't possibly measure up!

And what about us? Are we prepared to meet God in the people we have known, people from our neighborhoods who have gone away and now have come back to speak God's word to us, or perhaps awakened to God's call to speak while leading apparently ordinary lives at home?

Perhaps our former neighbor has gone to work with immigrants at our southern border and tells us that there is truth to their claims of persecution and that our government is wrong in the way it is proceeding. Will we listen? Perhaps our neighbor is a woman who calls out for mutuality among women and men, and equality in every way for blacks and women. God speaks to us from the pulpit or the encampment, the prison, the street corner or across the backyard.

True, not every compelling voice is the voice of God. Not every cry is a cry for justice. But let us not say, as Jesus' fellow townspeople did, "Where did he get all of this? What wisdom does he have?" If we do not give each person a chance to speak, we may never hear the word of God where we live each day.

While not everyone is a prophet, every person can have something to say that we need to hear. To help us work through what is real, true and life-giving as the storms of politics, culture and misplaced social certainty swirl around us, we have the Scriptures, more than two thousand years of meditating on those Scriptures, the thinking of the community and our own conscience to help us discern: Is the word we hear from the Lord or not?

When Jesus came to Nazareth and found so little faith, he was unable to perform the signs and miracle he had in Capharnaum, where people were less judgmental and more open to him. His neighbors from home judged him a failure. In fact, the failure was theirs.

Earlier in this homily, I asked if we are prepared to meet God in unexpected people and places. Now consider the possibility that we may be the ones in Jesus' sandals—the ones discredited or ignored.

Maybe we are the unsatisfactory leader, taken from the ranks—one of the kids on the block. Him? I knew him when he was a kid. A real troublemaker! Her? She hardly opened her mouth when she was in school. No inspiration!

But maybe we *are* called to wear Jesus' sandals. Maybe we are being called to say to people of our day in the cadence of Jesus: The reign of God is among us. Let's make justice flourish here and practice kindness toward everyone, including the stranger. Let us help each other, treasure each other. Let us stand up to the forces of darkness that threaten light and growth.

Paul, in today's second reading, confesses, "Three times I begged the Lord to take this cross from me. Each time, God replied 'My grace is sufficient for you.'"

The power of the weak makes sense only in the God context. The prophets and Jesus knew this. In their sandals, let's dare not to be afraid to hear God's word, and then speak it to our needy world, no matter the cost.