

14th Sunday in OT + 7 July 2024 + Ezek 2:2-5, II Cor 12:7-10, Mk 6:1-6a

In our Gospel last Sunday, Jesus revealed Himself to be our divine healer. Today, we hear Him reveal Himself to be a prophet. And as we shall see, He is not just any “ordinary” prophet. But before we consider what kind of a prophet He is, we need to first back up and consider what it means to be a prophet in the first place.

So to begin, we often think of a prophet as someone who can foresee the future. Now, there may be an element of foreknowledge in the life of a prophet, but that’s not really what it means in the Biblical sense. Rather, a prophet can be defined as someone who speaks in the name of God, by God’s authority, because they are inspired by God. Now this is true of Jesus, but with one critical addition that makes Him different than all the other prophets who went before Him. That is, He speaks in the name of God, *as God*. More on that in a moment.

In our Gospel today, we hear how Jesus has a homecoming of sorts, but it is sadly not a hero’s welcome! He has taught the people *as one with authority*. He has set people free from demonic possession. He has performed mighty deeds, the greatest so far being His raising a little girl from death to life, as we heard about last Sunday. But His own people are not impressed. In fact, it is just the opposite; we hear that *they took offense at him*. And so we must ask, why would Jesus’ very presence provoke such a negative reaction from His own people?

Well, as was in the time of the Old Testament, this is often the Prophet’s difficult lot in life. This was the case for the author of our 1st reading today, Ezekiel, as it was for so many of the other prophets like Elijah, Jeremiah, and Amos. More often than not, the prophets faced rejection, scorn, or even violence from those whom they sought to teach, because most of us don’t like to be challenged in our ways, especially by someone we think is no better than anyone else. But the prophets preached anyway, because they were compelled by the Holy Spirit to do so. St. Paul, the author of our 2nd reading today and a prophet in his own right, would go so far as to exclaim in his 1st letter to the Corinthians: *Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!* (9:16).

So now, back to Jesus. The crowd asks, *where did this man get all this?* Because to His own people, Jesus is merely a man. They think they have Him all figured out: He is just a simple carpenter, the son of Mary. They know Jesus’ relatives (note that *brothers and sisters* here just means “close relatives,” not literal brothers and sisters). And so they are offended; after all, who is *He* to speak to *them* with authority? But the crowds are mistaken. They don’t really know Jesus. They don’t know that His authority comes from God the Father, because He is the very Son of God, present in their midst!

So how does Jesus react to this whole sad scene? Well, you get the sense of a kind of sadness, or perhaps even righteous anger in His rebuttal: *A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house.* Jesus identifies Himself with that long line of rejected prophets who, time and again, the Lord sent to His people to call them back to Himself. Now here *God* is present in their midst, and they still won't listen! To sum it all up, Mark offers this devastating conclusion: *So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.*

So how might we apply this sad episode to our lives today? First of all, I think it is fair to assume that all of us want to hear God's voice. In a world in which social media has multiplied words almost beyond comprehension, and where there are few if hardly any truly authoritative voices, we are desperate to hear God's voice, to hear the truth. But if we really want to hear Him, we must have open ears. The 1st chapter of the Book of Wisdom instructs us: *seek [the Lord] in integrity of heart; Because he is found by those who do not test him, and manifests himself to those who do not disbelieve him (v. 1-2).* Our Gospel conclusion still applies today: many do not hear the Lord because they don't really believe that He still speaks. Or, they seek the truth from the world and not from God, and only end up hopeless and confused.

Next, we must be willing to hear the truth from the Lord, even when it is difficult. If you read the OT books of the prophets, you will hear a whole range of prophecy: some is very comforting, some is very disconcerting. Even in the Gospels, the definitive prophet, Jesus Christ, says some very comforting things: *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest (Mt 11:28);* and some very difficult things: *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak (Mt 12:36).* And we need to hear all of it, because sometimes we need a word of comfort, and sometimes we need a dose of discipline.

And that leads to the last point: we need to constantly practice discernment of the different messages that are constantly being put in our minds. I have found that a question as simple as "*am I seeing this situation from a human, worldly perspective, or from the perspective of God*" can help greatly in re-orienting a difficult situation. It may not make the problem go away, but thinking with the mind of God will alleviate a lot of stress and anxiety. But to do this, we also have to know what God's perspective is. And that requires consistent, intentional time in daily prayer, familiarity with God's word, the grace of the Sacraments: especially the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance. Only in this way will the Lord be honored as a Prophet in His own house; that is, in our hearts.