

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading: (Ezekiel 2.2-5)

The Call of a Prophet

This is the story of the call of Ezekiel to be a prophet. There is an obvious parallel between the rejection of Ezekiel as a prophet and the rejection of Jesus by his own people of Nazareth. A prophet is not simply someone who foretells the future. The task of a prophet is to tell people how God sees things, for the prophet sees things as God sees them. This directness of vision is not always popular, for we don't always like being told home truths about ourselves.

The truth about ourselves is often unwelcome, particularly when it involves criticism and demands change. Ezekiel was sent to the people of Israel, exiled in Babylon, to encourage them and tell them that, despite their disastrous losses, all was not lost. The hope of Israel was in them, rather than in the remnant left in Jerusalem. They were 'stubborn and obstinate' and refused to listen. We are prepared to listen to criticisms of others merrily enough, and agree heartily. However, the word of God often comes to us in ways that we do not recognize, criticisms of ourselves, perhaps spoken in anger, or only 95 per cent true, but no less a valid criticism for that.

Question:

Name a dozen different ministries in the Church. How can you tell to which you are called?

Second reading: (2 Corinthians 12. 7-10)

Paul's Weakness and Strength

In this final part of the letter, Paul is defending his apostolate against a rival group of preachers whom he caricatures as 'super-apostles'. They claim to have authority greater than his. Paul replies by claiming that he is more fully a servant of the Lord Jesus. Most of his claim is an invaluable autobiographical sketch. He grounds his claim on three factors. First, he outlines the sufferings and persecutions he has undergone in the service of Christ. Just as Jesus sees himself as the Suffering Servant of the Lord prophesied by Isaiah, so by his sufferings Paul sees himself as the servant of the Lord Jesus. Second, Paul speaks of his heavenly vision, the experience or revelation of 'words that may not and cannot be spoken by any human being', obviously the core inspiration of his life. Third, in this passage, he stresses his own weakness, which makes him rely on God's strength. What this weakness was we do not know. Neither is its exact nature significant. The point is that it prevented Paul becoming proud and made him rely on God's strength to counteract it. We probably all need a whacking great fault or failure to curb our pride. I'd be too ashamed to tell you mine.

Question:

What is the weakness of which you are most ashamed?

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Gospel:

(Mark 6. 1-6)

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

The very last sentence of the reading speaks of their lack of faith. What was this lack of faith? They recognized in Jesus an extraordinary wisdom and a power of miracles, but this seems not to have been enough. What more was needed?

Faith is not the acceptance of a set of propositions, 'I believe that the earth circles the sun', etc. It is putting all my trust in God as my only hope. Abraham, the model of faith, went out into the desert, leaving everything on which he relied, everything that made him what he was. He even trusted God to get him out of the unbearable fix when God told him to sacrifice his only son. The townsfolk of Nazareth presumably thought they knew Jesus through and through. They were prepared to acknowledge his wisdom and his miracles. But they were not prepared to go further and see that God was at work in him, that he was the manifestation of God among them.

It is all very well to admire Jesus, to think him a fine teacher and a heroic, honourable man, who gave everything for his high ideals; but unless we see God in him, the divine transcendence of all that is human, he cannot work the miracle of taking us to himself.

Question:

Would Jesus have been hurt by their failure to recognize him?

How was it that they did not react more favourably?
