

14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, B
REJECTED BUT NEVER ABANDONED

*“A prophet is only despised in his own country among his relations
and in his own country among his relations and in his own house”
(Mk. 6: 4)*

Our knowledge of people can either enhance our relationship with them positively or affect it negatively. The age-old adage that says “Familiarity breeds contempt” accents to the likelihood of the negative impact of such knowledge. For often, the more we know someone, the less we recognise and appreciate their value and /or greatness. This is what happened today in the Gospel to Jesus among His people. The experience of Jesus recalls the ordeals of the prophets of old and points to what would become a common denominator in the lives of those who would follow in the footsteps of Jesus in the future. Each of us must know that when we choose to walk the Way of Jesus, we will certainly encounter indifference, scorn, abuse, hatred, betrayal, weakness, persecution, rejection, and hostility. The Book of Sirach forewarns: “My son, if you have decided to serve the Lord prepare yourself for trials” (Sir. 2: 1).

In the First Reading (Ezek. 2: 2-5), the prophet Ezekiel is sent to “the Israelites, to the rebels who have turned against God.” These were notoriously stubborn people. Ezekiel’s mission was not without its inherent challenges – he was persecuted and rejected for speaking the mind of God to his people, whose obstinacy had sent them in exile to Babylon.

In the Second Reading (2 Cor. 12: 7-10), Paul struggles with “a thorn in the flesh” which kept his pride under check so that his only strength was from the grace of God. Yes, there will be persecution and even death, but the Lord never abandons His own to perdition. He promised to be with Ezekiel, whether the people accepted his word or not and made His grace sufficient for Paul all through his missionary journeys. As Christians, though the road may be rough and the walk seems long, we must never forget to surrender our hands to be held by God, who will ensure our safe arrival and smooth landing. Let us now sift from the story of Jesus in the Gospel and see how Jesus deals with such situations.

In the Gospel (Mk. 6: 1-6), Jesus goes to His hometown of Nazareth, a small town of a few hundred people. In such a small community, where everyone would have known everyone else, one would have expected Jesus to receive a warmer welcome and loving response from His people. But that was not the case. Instead, the people became his worst critics. A certain author said that “There are no severer critics of any man than those who have known him since his boyhood.” That is what happened to Jesus. These people had known Him even before He was born. They knew His father to be a common carpenter. His mother, Mary, the daughter of Joachim and Anne, was a simple local woman, who became pregnant before she lived in with her husband. They knew all these about Jesus

and His family. How little they knew, yet they thought they knew everything about Him. Is it not true, as Dionysius posits, that a little knowledge intoxicates, deeper knowledge makes a man sober? Sometimes we find ourselves judging people and relating with them based only on a few things we know about them. The error of judging the whole from a part. Human beings are often too presumptuous. No wonder the Psalmist prays: “From presumption, restrain Your servant, O Lord” (Ps. 19: 13). This should be our prayer too.

Where did this man get all this? When Jesus entered the Synagogue and began to teach, the people were “astonished” by the wisdom and authority with which he spoke, like the other people (Mk. 1: 22; 11: 18). But unlike the others, their astonishment was veiled with contempt and disgust. They asked the right question: “Where did this man get all this?” This is the question that we should all be asking each time we read the Gospel as it leads us to deeper search and urges us to desire to know Him more. But their questioning was not a genuine search for answers to deepen their faith, rather it was soured with scepticism and mockery.

“Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary ...?” This other question reveals the spiteful content of their hearts. They described Him from the ordinariness of His profession as a carpenter, a handy man, a workingman, and a commoner. Only in Mark’s Gospel and on this occasion is Jesus called “the son of Mary.” Contrary to the Jewish tradition, where sons were referred to by paternal appellation, here Jesus was identified as Mary’s Son. Some scholars see this as a pointer to the fact that at that time Joseph was no more, hence the reference to Mary. But others assess it as a wilful derogatory appellation that reflects their low regard for Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus was not deterred by any of these. He knew who He was and was convinced of His mission. He trusted in the Father’s love, and nothing would divert His attention. We too must remain resolute in our response to God. Let nothing discourage you.

The brothers and sisters of Jesus: The Church teaches that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. These “brothers and sisters” of Jesus are not uterine siblings. They are never referred to “sons and daughters” of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The word *adelphoi*, the Greek for “brethren” has a broader meaning than blood brothers. The ancient Hebrew had no word for “cousin”, therefore, it was customary to use “brethren” for relationships other than blood brothers. If Jesus had brothers, why did He entrust the care of His mother to John, His apostle, and not one of these brothers. The word “brethren” is used quite broadly in the New Testament especially in the writings of Paul. Mary had no other child, and Jesus had no direct brothers or sisters. We, who hear His word and keep it are His brothers and sisters (Lk. 11: 28).

Knowledge that is not open to the truth obstructs Faith: The people of Nazareth claimed they knew all about Jesus. They held on to their half-baked knowledge and preconceived ideas and would not open their hearts to learning something new about Jesus. Their eyes were blurred, their hearts were hardened and their

minds impervious to the truth. Therefore, they would not accept Jesus. This negative attitude of the Nazarenes became an obex to their benefitting from the power of Jesus – “He could work no miracles there.” Faith is fundamental to the experience of miracles. “Faith is God’s door into human hearts, but it can only be opened from within.” We hold the keys and God cannot force it open.

My dear friends, let the trials, persecutions and rejections of Ezekiel, Paul and Jesus remind us that we too will be tried, tested, and rejected in this life. Let the outcome of their lives encourage us to persevere to the end, where the glory awaits us. And let us pray that we may let our hearts be open so that we can learn more about this God, Who loves us so much that He sent His Son to die for us so that we may have life in full (Jn. 10: 10).