

14th Sunday in Ord. Time – July 7-8, 2018

By the end of this 5th Chapter of the Gospel of Mark as he recounts the journey and mission of Jesus, an enormous momentum has been created. Jesus has traveled throughout Galilee and beyond, proclaiming the kingdom of God and demonstrating its presence with healings and exorcisms and even the raising of a dead child which heard about last Sunday.

Despite some fierce opposition from the religious authorities the advance of the kingdom of God looks quite triumphant. Crowds of people have been coming more and more to experience the teaching and healing and compassion of Jesus.

But, at the beginning of Chapter 6 – which we just heard, this activity suddenly comes to a grinding halt. The mighty works of Jesus that hostile opponents, demons, diseases, and even death could not stop are blocked – at least temporarily – by a greater obstacle – namely – unbelief or lack of faith.

It is not that Jesus' power is limited, but people are hindered from experiencing his power by their refusal to believe in him.

It seems that some of the Gospel writers point out how Jesus uses miracles such as the feeding of the multitudes to call people to faith, but St. Mark makes a big emphasis in his Gospel about the need for faith in order to experience the full effect of Jesus' grace and power.

So deep was this lack of faith in the people of Jesus' hometown that he is unable to perform any mighty deeds apart from curing a few sick people.

And what was Jesus' reaction? He was amazed at their lack of faith. Interestingly, he shows that same emotion as a positive reaction to people who have faith. Remember last week how Mark focused on the faith of the woman and the faith of the synagogue official and not on the miracles.

Few things cause such a strong human reaction in Jesus as a lack of faith or on the other hand great faith.

Faith is Jesus' door into human hearts, but it is a door that can be opened only from within. When people do open that door of faith, He is most happy to come and dwell in them and act in them and through them.

What blocks people/us from opening that door of faith? In today's Gospel we hear that it was the people's familiarity with the human identity of Jesus that made it difficult for them to have faith and accept the fact that God might be speaking to them through him.

It would be easy to judge the townspeople of Nazareth. How could they have been so blind as to fail to recognize the Messiah in their midst? But it is impossible to say who of us might have reacted similarly in the same circumstances. This story points to the "extraordinary ordinariness" of Jesus as the Son of God in this world. Cf., "When did we see Lord and not welcome you?"

The great lesson in today's gospel is that we have to be careful not to tell ourselves that we know who Jesus is. We do know some things about Jesus. We learned these from our parents, or from church or religious education. So we think we know all about Jesus. However, the great mystic St. John of the Cross, tells us that no matter what we know about Jesus it is only the beginning.

We always can grow deeper in our knowledge and relationship with Christ. Yet such things as becoming too familiar with the routine of the Mass or the reasons for coming to church such as just for appearance or for curiosity can block our openness to Christ and to the new things he wishes to tell us or do for us.

Jesus offers us the miracle of himself present for us in the Eucharist which will touch each person that is open to his presence. What is lacking sometimes is our confidence and faith for this miracle to have an effect in our life.

In the first reading God calls Ezekiel to speak as a prophet to the Israelites, but also prepares him for the rejection that will come at his words.

This reading sets us up for the rejection that Jesus will receive as prophet of God's word in his ministry. Jesus is not rejected for his teachings about the love of God. What causes him to be rejected is when his word either calls them or challenges them to change their ways. Who wants to hear words that call us to bend our will in a different direction? It is easier to harden our hearts and to forget that such words were spoken.

What else can block our faith? The first reading points out that there are many people who are quite stubborn in their ways -- none of us of course -- who refuse to have their worldviews adjusted with new information or consider alternative ways of approaching an issue or solving a problem. And as this helps us relate to Jesus' rejection it also helps us understand or accept rejections of our own witness of faith.

For example, after someone has had an experience that brings them to a see and express their faith on a whole new level, they may find themselves teased or mocked by those with whom they are most familiar. They may feel threatened by the changes they see and their reaction may be one of rejection.

Another obstacle to faith is that instead of being happy and praising God for the success or good work of others, we envy or resent them. The people of Jesus' hometown were filled with resentment of him.

The fact is that we encounter “prophets” in many forms and we need to accept them and listen to them. It may be someone who warns about the harm that we are causing to our environment by certain actions. It may be a friend who is concerned about the behavior they see in another, etc.

Right in our homes, parents and grandparents are often the first to be the prophets in a their teen’s life. Like the prophets in today’s readings, they are certainly without honor in their home as they try to teach their children about proper ways of behavior. They are not predicting the future but they see the possible outcomes of certain behavior and they speak out about these things to their children and grandchildren.

We are quite blessed to have such prophets of God for us in all areas of life. The issue being addressed in today’s reading is whether we will have the faith and openness to receive their messages.

Too often, especially we as adults caught up in all the struggles and survival of everyday life may not have the luxury of time to reflect on the Sunday readings or homily, the advice of a loved one, or what the newspaper or magazine media columnist may be saying.

Only when a place and time are set aside for silence and reflection can we truly hear what is being said and take it to heart. When this happens, conversions take place. The challenge of today’s readings is to listen deeply to the Word of God, wherever and from whomever it may be spoken.

Be sure of this – God will always be calling forth prophets to speak to us and guide us in this life.