

Homily for July 6, 2003
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Father Charles Bowes

Ezekiel 2:2-5
2 Corinthians 12:7-10
Mark 6:1-6

Great things come about through what seems to be insignificant people and deeds.

Failure. That's a word hard to hear, isn't it? We run from it; we are embarrassed by it. Yet that's what this gospel is about, Mark chapter 6. Jesus returns to his hometown only to experience utter failure. This story is about the rejection of Jesus by the people of his own hometown of Nazareth.

His neighbors said, "Where did he get all this? With what kind of wisdom is he endowed? How is it that such miraculous deeds happen through his hands?"

The source of his hometown's skepticism seems to be Jesus' ordinary, even humble, background. "Isn't this the carpenter, the son Mary, a brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters our neighbors here?" They cannot accept the kingdom of God when it is revealed in such an "ordinary" vessel.

But this is how Saint Mark portrays Jesus - as the Suffering Just One who appears in the prophet Isaiah chapters 52 and 53: "There was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him, nor appearance that would attract us to him. ...Avoided by men... and we held him in no esteem." Rejection is a theme running throughout the gospel of Saint Mark. Jesus is rejected by

the leaders, by his family, by his hometown, and even by his disciples at the moment of his arrest. "Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured...like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth," says Isaiah.

For Saint Mark's gospel, somehow the proclamation of the gospel, the telling of God's saving deeds in Jesus necessarily entails rejection and failure.

The reason Jesus experiences rejection by his hometown people is simple - he is too ordinary. He is a local craftsman (a carpenter) whom everyone knows. His whole family is well known around the village. He is just "one of us." What makes him pretend to be something that he's not? Jesus is just so human that it's virtually impossible for folks to think of him to be somehow connected to the Divine.

This is all part of Saint Mark's strong emphasis on the radical incarnation, the radical enfleshment of Jesus. While Jesus is fully divine, at no point will Saint Mark's gospel allow that divinity to diminish Jesus' full humanity. Jesus himself recognizes the fact that he will not be accepted in his hometown as anything other than a carpenter.

"Oppressed and condemned he was taken away, and who would have thought anymore of his destiny?"

continues the prophet Isaiah.

The point of this gospel of Saint Mark is simple: God's purpose comes forth and emerges through the faithfulness of Jesus. God's purpose will emerge through the faithfulness of Jesus' followers - no matter how insignificant.

And that's you and I, folks. The deeds we do don't have to be recognized in order to be great and salvific and meaningful and insightful for the world. The point is that we remain faithful - faithful to the call we each experience wherever that leads into whatever circumstances.

Furthermore, if we in our ordinariness can bear the weight of God's mystery, how about all the folks around us whom we in turn take for granted and see as simply ordinary - they too bear God's will of redemption for the world they touch - we not only redeem others, they in turn redeem us. That's how God works, through Jesus Christ and through all those touched by God's Spirit.

"Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear," says Isaiah.

As Mother Teresa of Calcutta was fond of saying, "I am not called to be successful; I am called to be faithful."

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