

SYNOPSIS: OT XIV [B] (July 5) HOMILY ON MARK 6: 1-6 (L-15)

Introduction: Today's readings introduce Jesus as a prophet and explain how prophets and other messengers from God inevitably suffer rejection. The readings challenge us to face rejection and hardship with prophetic courage.

Scripture lessons: The first reading, taken from the book of the prophet Ezekiel, tells us about his call from God to be a prophet. Yahweh warns Ezekiel that he is being sent to obstinate and rebellious Israelites in exile in Babylon. Hence, as God's prophet, he will have to face rejection and persecution for giving God's message. The reading gives us the warning that as Christians who accept the call of Jesus and seek to follow him, we also may face indifference and hostility, contempt and scorn, weakness, hardship and persecution, insults and rejection. In the second reading, St. Paul gives us the same warning from his experience that not only the prophets, but the apostles and missionaries also will have to encounter hardships and rejection in their preaching mission. Paul confesses that God has given him a share in Christ's suffering – a chronic illness which gave him pain, a "*thorn in the flesh*," so that he might rely on God's grace and might glory in the power of a strengthening God. The apostle invites us to rise above our own weakness and disability, cooperate with the grace of God and preach the word of God by word and example as Paul did. Today's Gospel passage, [Mark 6:1-6](#), shows us that many people of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth did not accept him as a prophet because they knew him and his family too well. They knew that he was a carpenter with no schooling in Mosaic Law and knew that he could not be the promised Messiah who would come from Bethlehem as a descendant of David's royal family. Besides, they were angry when Jesus not only did not work any miracles in Nazareth, but chided them with prophetic courage for their lack of faith and warned that he would go to other people to do his preaching and healing ministry.

Life messages: Today's Scriptures challenge us to face rejection with prophetic courage and optimism. Very often our friends, families, or childhood companions fail to listen to us and refuse to accept the words of grace, love and encouragement that we offer to them because they are too familiar with us. Hence, they are unable to see us as God's appointed instruments, the agents of God's healing and saving grace. But we have to face such rejection with prophetic courage because by our Baptism we are called to be prophets like Jesus, sharing his prophetic mission. As prophets, our task is to speak the truth and oppose the evils in our society without condoning or encouraging sinful behavior even in our dear ones. Let us also acknowledge, appreciate and encourage the prophets of our time who stand for truth and justice in our society with the wisdom of God in their heads, the power of the Holy Spirit in their words and the courage of God in their actions.

OT XIV [B] (July 5) Ez 2: 2-5; II Cor 12: 7-10; Mark 6: 1-6

Anecdotes: # 1: Rev. Deacon Prophet: There is a funny story about a bishop who was interviewing a senior seminarian before his ordination as deacon, and asked him where he would like to be assigned as a deacon for pastoral training. The seminarian said, somewhat boldly, "Oh, my bishop, anywhere but New Canaan!" "Why not there," the bishop asked? "You know," the seminarian answered, "*That's my hometown -- and we all know that 'a prophet is not without honor except in his native place.'*" The bishop replied, "Don't worry my friend! Nobody in your hometown is going to confuse you with a prophet."

2: Don't allow rejection to derail your dreams: Brilliant British Theologian G.K. Chesterton could not read until he was eight years old. A teacher said if his head were opened they would probably find a lump of fat where there was supposed to be a brain. That teacher was wrong. Einstein's parents were informed by a teacher that he would never amount to anything. Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, was rejected by seven publishers. Richard Bach got twenty rejection slips before *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* was published. Dr. Seuss, one of the most popular children's authors of all time, got more than two dozen rejection slips before *The Cat in the Hat* made it to print. Ruth Graham felt an uncontrollable urge to run out of the meeting the first time she heard Billy Graham preach. She was not convinced of his preaching ability. She was put off by his preaching style. Billy had to improve his preaching before Ruth would become his wife. Today's Gospel tells us how Jesus encountered rejection with prophetic courage.

3: Good news to the poor! But are we poor? Mother Teresa thinks so. There was a beautiful article about her in *Time* magazine. She was asked about the materialism of the West. "The more you have, the more you are occupied," she contends. "But the less you have the freer you are. Poverty for us is a freedom. It is a joyful freedom. There is no television here, no this, no that. This is the only fan in the whole house...and it is for the guests. But we are happy. "I find the rich poorer," she continues. "Sometimes they are lonelier inside...The hunger for love is much more difficult to fill than the hunger for bread...The real poor know what is joy." When asked about her plans for the future, she replied, "I just take one day. Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not come. We have only today to love Jesus." Is there anyone in this Church as rich as Mother Teresa?

Introduction: Today's readings introduce Jesus as a prophet and explain how prophets and other messengers from God inevitably suffer rejection. The readings challenge us to face rejection and hardship with prophetic courage. The first reading, taken from the book of the prophet Ezekiel, tells us about his call from God to be a prophet. Yahweh warns Ezekiel that he is being sent to obstinate and rebellious Israelites in exile in Babylon. Hence, as God's prophet, he will have to face rejection and persecution for giving God's message. The reading gives us the warning that as Christians who accept the call of Jesus and seek to

follow him, we also may face indifference and hostility, contempt and scorn, weakness, hardship and persecution, insults and rejection. In the second reading, St. Paul gives us the same warning from his experience that not only the prophets, but the apostles and missionaries also, will have to encounter hardships and rejection in their preaching mission. Paul confesses that God gave him a share in Christ's suffering – a chronic illness which gave him pain, a "*thorn in the flesh*" – so that he might rely on God's grace and might glory in the power of a strengthening God. Paul invites us to rise above our own weakness and disability, cooperate with the grace of God and preach the word of God by word and example as the apostle did. Today's Gospel passage, ([Mark 6:1-6](#)), shows how many people of Jesus' hometown Nazareth did not accept him as a prophet because they knew him and his family. They knew that he was a carpenter with no schooling in Mosaic Law and that he could not be the promised Messiah who would come from Bethlehem as a descendant of David's royal family. Besides, they were angry when Jesus did not work any miracles in Nazareth, chided them with prophetic courage for their lack of faith and warned that he would go to other people to do his preaching and healing ministry.

First reading, Ezekiel 2:2-5: Today's reading from Ezekiel captures the same experience in the career of the prophet Ezekiel, who lived about 600 years before Jesus. Ezekiel is warned by God that, though he has been called by Yahweh and sent with a message to the people of Israel, they will almost certainly refuse to hear and accept his message. God is angry about the rebelliousness of the people to whom he is sending his prophet. Ezekiel was the first person called to become a prophet while the people were in Exile in Babylon. While the false prophets were consoling people, saying that the Exile was soon to end and they'd be going home to a newly prosperous Jerusalem soon, Ezekiel resolutely foretold the further destruction of Jerusalem. No wonder he was hated and rejected by the people! Those who accept the call of God and seek to follow Him may face indifference and hostility, contempt and scorn, weakness, hardship and persecution, insults and rejection.

Second Reading, 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10: In today's selection, Paul frankly admits the fact he had learned by trial and error, that he couldn't preach the Gospel on the basis of his own strength and talent. Rather, the weaker he became, the more room he left for the Spirit of God to work through him. In the midst of a conflict with the Corinthian Christian community, Paul tells about two of his deepest spiritual experiences. In one he had an ecstatic theophany when he received an exceptional revelation. In the other, he fervently prayed to have the unidentified cause of great suffering removed, but was given instead the reassurance that God's grace would be sufficient for his every need. Paul's opponents within the Corinthian community presumed that an authentic apostle would be vindicated by heavenly visitation and a miraculous healing. Instead, Paul discovered positive value in his pain. He understood that suffering, accepted as God's gift, produces patience, sensitivity and compassion and a genuine appreciation of life's blessings. Hence, Paul declares that the weaknesses which continue to mark his life as an apostle represent the effective working of the power of the crucified Christ in his ministry. Paul was content with weaknesses and

hardships for the sake of Christ; we, too, find God's grace sufficient for our needs, for Christ's power dwells in us in our weakness, and in weakness we are truly strong.

Exegesis: The context: It was natural that Jesus should visit his hometown, Nazareth, as a rabbi with a band of his disciples. On the Sabbath day he went to the local synagogue. In the synagogue there was no definite person to give the address. Any distinguished stranger present who had a message to give might be asked by the ruler of the synagogue to speak. Since Jesus' fame as a preacher and miracle worker in other places of Galilee had reached Nazareth, he was invited to read from the Prophets and explain the text. During his "Inaugural Address" or "Mission Statement," Jesus took upon himself the identity of a prophet, different from the image of a miracle worker that people wished to see. As other faithful prophets of Israel had done, Jesus, too, held people accountable for their selfishness, their faithlessness to God, their lack of justice and mercy (Mi 6:6-8), and their sinfulness.

The adverse reaction: The first reaction of the people in the synagogue to Jesus' words was one of astonishment. Luke says they were "*amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.*" But Mark says that they asked one another: "*Where did this man get all this? They knew him only as a carpenter from a poor family, with no formal training in Mosaic Law. Certainly they thought he had gone far beyond what one of his status as a humble carpenter should go. (One of the dreams of Martin Luther King was that people "would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character").* Jesus' neighbors did not expect him, "the carpenter's son," to be skilled in interpreting the Scriptures. They also could not understand how a mere carpenter could be their political Messiah who would liberate them from Roman rule and reestablish the Davidic kingdom of power and glory. The local townsfolk also objected that Jesus had no distinguished lineage. He is identified as "the son of Mary" (v. 3) rather than the traditional "son of Joseph" ("Bar Joseph") title. Such a reference could be seen as an insult because men in that culture were identified by who their fathers were (see John 1:45). Jesus responded: "*No prophet is accepted in his native place.*" Those who accept the call of God and seek to follow Him may face indifference and hostility, contempt and scorn, weakness, hardship and persecution, insults and rejection.

Life messages: 1) Let us face rejection with prophetic courage and optimism. The story of Jesus' rejection in his own town is a story that we can identify with, because it is a story that has happened to most of us. We might have experienced the pain of rejection caused by hurts, wounds, betrayal, divorce, abandonment, violated trust, trauma, neglect or various forms of abuse. What about rejection by those closest to us? Often our friends, families, or childhood companions fail to listen to, and refuse to accept, the words of grace, love and encouragement that we offer to them, because they are too familiar with us. Hence, they are unable to see us as God's appointed instruments, the agents of God's healing and saving grace. Let us check also the other side of the coin. How often do we discount God's agents through prejudice? How often do we fail to see God's image in them

because of our own hardheartedness? We must realize that God's power is always available to transform even the most unlikely people.

2) We need to handle rejection in the right spirit: a) We can handle rejection with respect – respect for ourselves and respect for others. Our first reaction to rejection is often anger – anger at ourselves for assuming we deserve what we got and bitterness toward others who perpetuate the rejection. In the face of rejection, we will be wise to follow the advice of St. Paul who said, “Be angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down on your anger.” b) We need to avoid self-defeating assumptions. One rejection need not be an indictment on one’s life. Rejection is not synonymous with continuous failure. c) We need to avoid magnifying the rejection. Rejection need not be a forecast of our future, and it must not become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rejection in the past need not be a predictor of rejection in the future. d) We need to avoid allowing rejection to derail our dreams and instead to keep coming back. e) We need to learn from our rejections. We are not perfect, and we do not always get it right, but we need to keep coming back until we do get it right. Every rejection can be a lesson if we stay open to new possibilities and new opportunities. What can I do differently? How can I improve? What needs can I meet? These are the questions we need to ask if we are to prevent a trouble from going to waste.

3) Let us acknowledge the prophets of God’s goodness in our midst. God is present giving us his message through our nearest and dearest and our neighbors and coworkers. Since God uses them as His prophets to convey His message to us, it is our duty to acknowledge and honor them. Let us express our appreciation today for our families – spouses for each other, parents and children for each other. A word of appreciation for the lady who cooks the dinner, for the neighbor who is always ready to share our happiness and sorrow, for the friends who have given us time, support and attention during a recent bereavement or a tragedy in our life – all are our proper responses to God’s messengers of love and light. Let us not take for granted the presence of God among us as evidenced by the goodness shown by family and friends. Let us also recognize God’s direction, help and support in our lives through His words in the Bible and through the advice and examples of others.

4) **We must have the prophetic courage of our convictions.** By our Baptism, God calls us to be prophets like Jesus, sharing his prophetic mission. The task of a prophet is to speak God’s truth. We must never be afraid of this call. We may rely on Jesus to supply us with the courage to oppose the many evils in our society. By legalizing abortion in 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed the killing of over thirty million unborn children in forty-two years and it is tolerating the brutal execution of 4400 defenseless lives every day by abortion. Our television and movie conglomerates, which are supported by the tax money of millions of citizens, systematically poison the minds of the young as well as the old by the excessive importance given to perverted sex and unnecessary violence. Many well-known corporate sponsors support more than 75,000 U. S. websites of pornographic material, thus enabling the destructive behavior of perverts and sex abusers. Our society tells youngsters that promiscuous sex, drugs and alcohol are means by which they express their

individuality. It is here that our country needs Christians with the prophetic courage of their convictions to fight against such moral evils.

5) We need to speak the truth of Christ with love, never being hypocritical or disrespectful. We must never remain silent in the face of evil for fear of being thought "politically incorrect." Jesus was not against conflict if it promoted truth. He taught us to give respect and freedom without condoning or encouraging sinful behavior. Love does not tolerate destructive behavior but, nevertheless, it sometimes causes pain--just as a surgeon must sometimes hurt in order to heal. We can be kind, charitable, and honest and forgiving as we speak forth our own convictions as Jesus did in the synagogue.

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