

14TH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE B

Ezekiel 2: 2-5 + Psalm 123: 1-4 + 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10 + Mark 6: 1-6

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: July 5, 2015

For three successive Sundays we have listened to Gospel accounts concerning faith. For three consecutive Sundays the evangelist Mark has placed before us encounters between Jesus and those who place their faith in him, and those who do not.

Two Sundays ago as the disciples in the swamped boat were drowning in fear, Jesus calmed the raging waters of the sea and the storm of their fear, challenging them: "Do you not yet have faith?"

Last Sunday we encountered with Jesus two people of great faith, a woman who knew she would be healed of her bleeding if she could just touch Jesus' cloak, and Jairus, who begs Jesus to heal his dying daughter.

Today we come face to face with those who think they know Jesus best but who do not really know him at all---the people of his hometown in Nazareth. Jesus, amazed by their lack of faith, is unable to perform any mighty deed in Nazareth.

For three Sundays in a row in Mark's Gospel we have been challenged to ponder the meaning of faith. What is faith? Why do some people lack faith in the Lord and others have great faith?

God gives God's very self to us in Christ Jesus, and faith is our response to that gift. God gives God's self to us in baptism as we are filled with the life of the Lord Jesus, claimed by the Father as His beloved son or daughter, and through the gift of the Spirit, become a new creation.

God also gives God's self to us in Holy Communion, as Christ Jesus pours his Risen life into us.

Every day Jesus is walking by our side, engaging us in one way or another.

Faith is our response to this ongoing self-gift of the Lord, who is constantly giving himself away to us in love.

Thus, faith is all about relationship---a growing relationship with the Lord Jesus, an ongoing response to Jesus' invitation to come and see where he lives.

The people who lived with Jesus in Nazareth think they know Jesus and thus resent his newfound power and popularity. "Who does he think he is?"

The problem with these hometown folks is they stopped growing in their relationship with Jesus.

They knew him as a kid who had grown up in their midst to become a carpenter. But that is when they stopped knowing him.

In fact, pride prevented them from acknowledging there was a lot they did not know or understand about Jesus, that he was a constant surprise to them.

These people are not simply faithless, they are arrogant, proud, and very full of themselves. They are obstinate of heart.

So sure of their opinion, and so confident that they know everything, the gift they might have been given in Jesus is refused.

Consequently, they have no share in the signs that point to God's presence among them—Jesus performs no mighty deeds in their midst.

Blinded by their certitude they cannot see who stands before them in the synagogue.

Deaf to everything but the sound of their own voices,

they cannot hear the good news being offered and proclaimed to them.

Instead of engaging in conversation with the one who calls for their conversion, they talk to themselves: "Where did this man get all this?"

Notice the people of Nazareth are so sure of themselves and their worldview that they dehumanize Jesus by not even calling him by name.

The way faith flourishes is by openness to the Lord Jesus, especially when his words and his presence are challenging.

But the people of Nazareth are not open to anything new, to anyone who goes beyond their narrow-minded, self-protecting expectations.

They reject the whole idea that someone can change, grow, and become an instrument of God's mercy and love.

By doing so, they cannot change---they do not grow—and God can do nothing with them.

As Bernard Lonergan says, "faith is knowledge born of religious love," or in other words, a knowing that comes through loving.

Loved by the Lord Jesus and daily responding to his invitation to come and see where he lives (living a life of faith), we learn there is more to know about him.

Like any important relationship in our life, our relationship with the Lord Jesus is ongoing, developing, growing, and it has its ups and downs.

What counts is a daily attempt on our part to respond to the love of the Lord.

Faith is married to humility, as we admit we do not know the Lord Jesus as well as we ought, that he has much more to reveal to us about his person.

What counts in our relationship with the Lord, which shows itself in our relationship to others and the world, is our openness and our desire to grow.

For conversion and growth in faith must be a continual way of life.

At no point in our lives may we entertain the idea that we know everything, and a refusal to listen and explore ideas contrary to our own is a sure sign that pride is at work, and that is a deadly sin when left unchallenged.

Worse than the tragedy of indifference is the haughty and smug attitude of a closed heart and made up mind which judges others and their ideas with presumptions and assumptions coming from within rather than from without.

Faith flourishes where there is an open heart and open mind.

People who stop learning and cease to wonder and study about faith and revelation will not be able to see God's mighty deeds, even if they are happening all around them.

The Gospel and the faith it nourishes must be fed by wonder and awe, curiosity and a desire for life, which always means growth and change.

Cardinal Avery Dulles describes faith as

“the radical conviction that we are surrounded and sustained by God's love.”

Since this is the foundational truth of our lives, that at every moment, with every breath, God's love surrounds and sustains us, we have nothing to fear.

Not the storms of nature nor of life.

Not chronic illness nor the death of a loved one.

Not even the challenge of change itself.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi