

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Ezekiel 2:2-5

Psalm 122

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Mark 6:1-6

We have a remarkable combination of readings today, which, taken together, can be seen to relate to the call that we have to preach and live out the Gospel in our lives. And this is not just about us priests and other “professional church people”. I’m sure you can each think of times when you’ve been at work or at school or out with friends or family, and someone says or does something very uncharitable or immoral or unjust or insulting to our faith, or there is discussion about controversial topics in the news, and—while you don’t want to make things too awkward—you also feel the need to say something. I’m sure you’ve all been in situations like that. So these three readings each offer insights into how we might proceed – and not only in these sorts of situations, but also in striving to live out our faith in everyday life.

To begin with, we see that there is a responsibility to stand up for truth, even if people don’t listen. In the first reading, God says to the prophet Ezekiel, “*Whether they listen or not, this set of rebels shall know there is a prophet among them.*” Now, we aren’t called to be Old Testament prophets. But in our baptism, we *have* become sharers in Christ’s threefold office of priest, prophet and king. We can sometimes forget the great dignity that is ours courtesy of our baptism, and in our confirmation we are strengthened to go forth and represent Christ in the world according to our various callings.

Obviously, this requires prudence. Standing up for truth is not about cramming things down other people’s throats, but rather representing Christ in a loving way – and, as much as possible, in a way that others will be able to receive, in both our actions and our words. Also, we need to be sure that what we say and do actually *is* from God, and that it’s not just our ego or emotion talking. Unlike Ezekiel, we usually don’t have the certitude that comes from God speaking with us directly. This requires careful discernment, and a willingness to bounce it off trusted friends, as well as a docility to the teaching of the Church.

We also need to keep our role in perspective. Saint Augustine is often attributed with having said that,

“The truth is like a lion. You don’t have to defend it. Let it loose. It will defend itself.”

Even though God certainly desires to use us, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that we are all that stands between God’s plan for the world and complete misery.

This leads us onto the second point: *we need to proceed with humility.* The supernatural nature of the spiritual life can make those of us who take religion

seriously prime targets for the sin of pride. In the second reading, Saint Paul talks about how he was given a “thorn in the flesh”, precisely so that he would not become too proud. The more involved in the things of God we become, the more of a temptation pride is, and thus the more we need to pray for the gift of humility – which, I’m afraid to say, often only comes through humiliating experiences! But Saint Paul assures us that, through it all, God’s grace is sufficient for us, and that it is precisely when we are weak that we are strong. This is so counter-intuitive, but it’s also so true! *When I am weak, then I am strong*, because it is *then* that I have *no choice* but to abandon myself to the strength of Christ, which is infinitely more powerful than my own strength could ever be.

So we have a responsibility to stand up for the truth when appropriate, and to do so with humility.

However, in the Gospel we see that, even if we *do* keep *our* part of the bargain, there is no guarantee that other people will receive it. In a remarkable passage, we see that the ability of Jesus—the Son of God—to work miracles seems to be *dependent* on the faith of those who would receive them! I should note that this is not really a case of God being unable to do something, but more a reflection of the fact that God respects our free will, and does not force himself upon us – rather, God waits for us to invite him in.

Nonetheless, if this pattern is true for Jesus, it’s certainly true for us. There is no guarantee that even our best efforts at sharing the truth of the Gospel will bear fruit. As you’ve heard me quote from Mother Teresa many times, “we are called to be faithful, not successful.” All we can do is that which we believe God is calling us to do, and then leave the rest in his all-knowing hands. We need to trust that our Lord sees the bigger picture, and that he is able to use our sincere efforts for his own purposes.

So to sum up, we are called to stand up for the truth of the Gospel as appropriate, with prudence and with charity. We are also called to do this with humility, trusting in the Lord’s power instead of our own. Finally, we cannot let ourselves get too hung up about results, but instead do our best to play our part and then leave it all in God’s hands.

To be sure, this is all easier said than done. Thankfully, we’re not alone. This is a large part of why we gather each week, to confess our shortcomings, to be nourished by God’s Word and his Body as a community of faith – and to support and pray for each other, that we may be guided by the Holy Spirit, and renewed as we go forth from here to share the immense joy that comes from knowing the Lord Jesus, who truly is the way, the truth and the life.