

**SPIRITUALITY**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

cf. Luke 4:18

**R.** Alleluia, alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
for he sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

**R.** Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel**

Mark 6:1-6a; L101B

**Jesus departed from there  
and came to his native  
place, accompanied by  
his disciples.**

**When the sabbath came  
he began to teach in  
the synagogue,  
and many who  
heard him were  
astonished.**

**They said, "Where did  
this man get all this?  
What kind of wisdom has  
been given him?**

**What mighty deeds are  
wrought by his hands!**

**Is he not the carpenter, the son of  
Mary,**

**and the brother of James and Joses  
and Judas and Simon?**

**And are not his sisters here with us?"**

**And they took offense at him.**

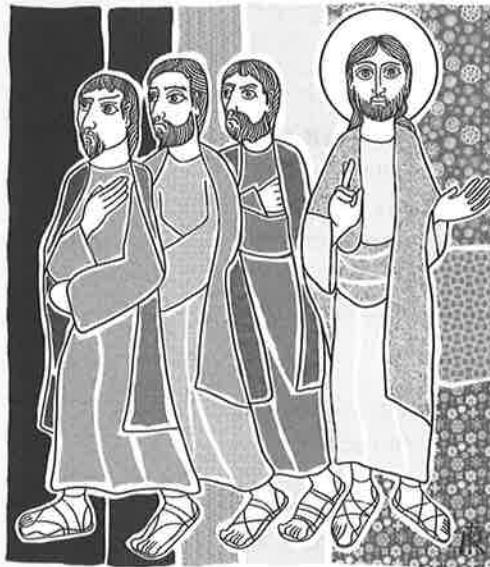
**Jesus said to them,**

**"A prophet is not without honor  
except in his native place  
and among his own kin and in his  
own house."**

**So he was not able to perform any  
mighty deed there,**

**apart from curing a few sick people  
by laying his hands on them.**

**He was amazed at their lack of faith.**



**Reflecting on the Gospel**

Viktor Frankl, the Austrian Jewish psychotherapist who endured four years in Nazi death camps, knew by bitter experience that what gives light must endure burning. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, he remembered the light that radiated from those who remained decent human beings in the midst of the darkness of suffering and dehumanizing conditions. Each reading this Sunday is about those who were singed by failure and vulnerability, but who continue to be a guiding light to their communities. Ezekiel is sent by God to the people named

as rebels, who are obstinate, defiant, and deaf to God's word. Paul finds himself facing opposition both from those who regard themselves as "super apostles" and who tout around the word of God for their own reputation, and also from the members of the Corinthian church who have fallen under their influence. And Jesus is found to be unacceptable and offensive in his own hometown of Nazareth.

Some cultures speak of the "tall poppy syndrome," the delight that some people have in cutting people down to size—usually a bit smaller than their size—by belittling them through subtle innuendo, and disguising resentment of another person's achievements by damning with faint praise. When Jesus is invited to teach in the Nazareth synagogue on the Sabbath, he fails to live up to the expectations of his hometown. What Jesus spoke to the synagogue assembly we are not told, but they were the authoritative words of the one

who has exorcised, healed, raised from the dead, and proclaimed the Good News of the kingdom. But in some way the listeners consider that Jesus's words go against their own comfortable interpretation of family customs or established religion traditions. Here is the Nazareth version of the "tall poppy," so Jesus has to be cut down to the hometown size expected by those who think they know everything about him and his family, and recognize him as a local craftsman.

Jesus embodies the "scandal" of the ordinary, and familiarity breeds contempt in the assembly whose perceptions are limited to the domestic and parochial. They are closed to any surprising presence and action of God that would violate their own expectations and insight, and consider their own wisdom to be superior to that of Jesus. They ask the right questions, but their prejudgment supplies them with the wrong answers, and amazement deteriorates into offense and rejection. If the synagogue assembly is amazed at Jesus and has no faith in him, Mark comments ironically that Jesus is amazed at their lack of faith that leads to Jesus's powerlessness, because for his deeds of power to be effective they must be worked in the context of faith. Jesus has failed to call forth faith where he might have most expected to find it.

That the "Word was made failure and died among us" is the source of our hope, not despair, for as Maria Boulding, OSB, writes: "If you have ever been sickened by the failure of some enterprise into which you put your best efforts and the love of your heart, you are caught up into the fellowship of Christ's death and resurrection, whether or not you thought of your experience in that way. God had dealt with our failure by himself becoming a failure and so heal-

ing it from the inside. This is why we can meet him in our failure; it is a sure place for finding him, since he has claimed it. So central is failure to the Easter mystery that a person who has never grappled with it could scarcely claim to be Christ's friend and follower" (*Gateway to Hope*).

We may still be more inclined to listen to those who appear to be prophets on the celebrity circuit rather than those with whom we rub shoulders daily. We need humble ongoing and gospel-based discernment of the authenticity of prophets. Continued success is a dangerous criterion.

**Focusing the Gospel**

**Key words and phrases:** He was amazed at their lack of faith.

**To the point:** Jesus visits his hometown of Nazareth and arrives at the synagogue to teach. At first the people are "astonished" at the wisdom of his words and the tales of mighty deeds that Jesus has performed around Galilee. Quickly though their astonishment turns to suspicion and even anger. The crowd cannot handle the dichotomy they perceive between the ordinary and the extraordinary. How can the boy they witnessed grow up be the same man who now is said to be able to calm the stormy sea with a word and to heal illness with the touch of his hand? In the incarnation, we proclaim Jesus as fully God and fully human. In Nazareth, Jesus's neighbors were unable to look past his humanity to be open to the divinity also present to them. As Christians, how do we challenge our own perceptions and find God within the ordinary events, people, and things in our everyday lives?

**Connecting the Gospel**

**to the first reading:** In the gospel Jesus tells those who have taken offense at his words, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place / and among his own kin and in his own house." In the first reading we encounter another prophet facing difficulty. God commissions the prophet Ezekiel to speak his word to the Israelites. Ezekiel's chances of success do not seem promising, as his prospective hearers are described as "[h]ard of face and obstinate of heart." Nonetheless, God sends Ezekiel, so that "whether they heed or resist . . . they shall know that a prophet has been among them."

**to experience:** Despite our failure as human beings to consistently respond to God's call with joyful trust, God continues to send messengers bearing his word and calling us to repentance. When have you experienced God's call and responded with an obstinate heart? Despite past refusals, how does God continue to call you to conversion?

**Connecting the Responsorial Psalm**

**to the readings:** For the times we have failed to answer the call of God and have instead been "[h]ard of face and obstinate of heart," our psalm offers a prayer of repentance: "Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy." In our baptism we have each been called to take up the mantle of "priest, prophet, and king." To be a prophet in the footsteps of Ezekiel and following the way of Christ, we must first listen before we speak. With eyes fixed upon the Lord, we become oriented to God's fidelity, beauty, and truth. As our being is permeated with the word and the presence of the Lord, we are able to prophesy to God's goodness in all that we do and say.

**to psalmist preparation:** This coming week, how might you rededicate yourself to fixing your eyes on the Lord?

**PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING**

God sends Ezekiel to prophesy to the people who have become "[h]ard of face and obstinate of heart." When have you experienced these traits in yourself? How did your heart become open to God again?

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God tells St. Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, / for power is made perfect in weakness." What weaknesses have you experienced transformed by God's grace?

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In the gospel Jesus proclaims, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place." Are there prophets in your community whose messages have been dismissed?

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We hear how the people in Jesus's hometown are unable to accept his teaching because they know him as "the carpenter, the son of Mary." In your relationship with Christ, how do you balance your understanding of him as fully God and fully human?

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