

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
July 5, 2009

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

Thus Says the Lord God

When I was ordained almost ten years ago, my classmates and I were encouraged not to go back to our home parish for our first diaconate assignment. And I think much of the reason behind this recommendation is associated with the same principle behind the way people reacted to Jesus in this morning's gospel story. If I had gone back to St. Clement Parish in Romeo, many would have been distracted from my preaching and ministry because of previous encounters they might have had with me or with my family. I had been sitting in the pews with them for the previous twenty years; what made me so special all of a sudden? I was just the simple man that lived down the road with the lawn that was not very neat; who schlepped around town in old work boots and worn jeans. The holes in my jeans was the only holiness the parishioners associated with me. I was the man who stood up and argued at the school board meetings about a millage election that had torn our community in two. And I was one of many who fought for the ouster of our school superintendent, who just happened to be a fellow parishioner. My credibility would have been compromised before I ever could get up and preach my first homily. Who was I to tell them what God wanted them to do? I wouldn't make a very convincing prophet in my home parish.

Jesus says in the gospel this morning: "*A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house.*" I surely don't mean to imply that I am a prophet, although we all receive a prophetic mission when we are baptized, but I at least need to try to be a witness to Christ and the teachings of His Church. And so it was good for me that the Holy Spirit sent me from my home in Romeo, first to Lake Orion, and then to Imlay City for the last 4-½ years. In Lake Orion I was received with open arms and respect, much as I was here. I was a stranger. My message was not always what some of the people wanted to hear, especially when I talked about sensitive moral issues, but I was not sent to tell them what they wanted to hear. As God told Ezekiel in our first reading: "*But you shall say to them: Thus says the LORD GOD! And whether they heed or resist—for they are a rebellious house—they shall know that a prophet has been among them.*" Hopefully I was in some ways a prophet during my stay in Lake Orion; I know of quite a few who were happy to see me leave.

And when I came here, you had no preconceived ideas about me. You gave me a chance and were at least open to hearing what I had to say to you. You, too, might not always like what I have to say, but if I only said what you wanted to hear, I probably wouldn't be doing my job. Interestingly, you are much more likely to at least listen to me, and consider the things I say, than my own brothers and sisters and other family members and close friends. It's tough sharing with our own families about our faith and about moral issues when they have a very set position which is in opposition to what we believe is the teachings of the Church. We need to make it clear what we believe, and why, but not get drawn into arguments. I've learned that you can never argue someone into the faith.

Our job is, as God told Ezekiel, to say to them ***“Thus says the Lord God.”*** The rest is up to them, ***“whether they heed or resist.”*** We need to live good lives as witnesses to what we preach. We need to be people of charity and joy. We need to fast and pray. And in these ways our friends and family members will know that ***“a prophet has been among them.”***

Have calm discussions with those that are interested in trying to honestly learn the truth and grow in faith, but avoid entering into arguments with those that attack your beliefs every time they see you at a family get-together. I heard someone suggest that when Uncle Charlie repeatedly attacks some aspect of your faith, that you assume the “bobble-head” approach. Simply listen and nod your head without offering any counterpoints; he doesn’t want to hear or listen to them anyway. You might say a silent prayer for him as your head bobs up and down; pray that he be cured of his confusion. In this way you will much more likely keep your peace, you will be much less likely to get frustrated and react in an uncharitable, non-Christian-like, manner. He will also stop bothering you much sooner allowing you to enjoy the company of others at the party.

The prophets were all persecuted, especially in their home towns and countries. Jesus was persecuted and His teachings offended those in His home town. As you carry out your prophetic mission as a baptized Catholic Christian, you too should expect persecution. When you speak words of truth, you too will offend many who are close to you. Many will not listen, ***“for they are a rebellious house.”*** But our job as prophets is only to speak and live the truth. ***“Whether they heed or resist...they shall know that a prophet has been among them.”***

Deacon Joe Hulway