

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Fr. Daniel Rayer

As the old saying goes, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” Unfortunately, the people of Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth had done just that with Jesus. “Is not this the carpenter?” They had known Him for years. They knew His mother and relatives. They could not accept the fact that someone who appeared to be so ordinary was filled with such great wisdom. How could one who was no better than themselves be so outstanding? Surely this carpenter named Jesus could not have great wisdom or the ability to work miracles. The people’s pride got in the way. If only they would have put their pride aside and had faith, then maybe they would have judged Him by His teaching instead of rejecting Him because of who He appeared to be to them.

The people of Nazareth also rejected Jesus because He was calling them to religious and moral conversion. Jesus spoke like the prophets. He spoke the hard message about sinfulness and the need for repentance and conversion. However, the result of Jesus’ preaching was not one of conversion, but of a hardening of the heart. Jesus offers the good news of forgiveness of sins and the coming of the kingdom of God. The people should have rejoiced that they were privileged to hear this message. They should have been the ones to accept Jesus’ message, setting the tone for all of Israel. Instead, their “no” sends a loud tremor throughout Israel. Their rejection would be a foreshadowing of the scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of the people, rejecting the claim that Jesus was the promised Messiah. But unknown to them, their rejection of Jesus put into action God’s plan of redemption and salvation. It would be through Christ’s death on the cross that would open the door for humanity to have life eternal with the Trinity.

But this is not the first time that God has known rejection. In the First Reading, the prophet Ezekiel is sent by God to a “nation of rebels.” How hard a task this must have seemed to Ezekiel: to preach to a people who did not want to listen to the word of God. But God never gets turned off. He always will be faithful. The people of Israel were God’s chosen people. He had made a covenant with them. He had treated them like a loving Father, leading them out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. Despite this, the people murmured and rebelled and forgot about God.

It was the result of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God that brought on them the Babylonian exile. But God still does not abandon them. Ezekiel is sent to them to preach the word of God. Some will listen and some will not, but at least the people will know “that a prophet has been among them.”

In contrast to the rejection shown in the First Reading and the Gospel, we have the acceptance of St. Paul. He accepts all the hardships that he has been given. He recognizes that his weakness is his strength. He had prayed that his ailment would be taken away. When it wasn’t, he doesn’t rebel, but he boasts in his weakness because it shows forth the power of Christ. Paul says “I am content with weakness, with mistreatment, with distress, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ; for when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong.” Paul shows us that life is not always a bed of roses. Life is full of difficulties and challenges, but our response must never be to reject Christ because of these; rather it is precisely when we are weak and suffer life’s hardships that we must turn to Christ. God’s power is all the more visible when he works through the weak. Paul shows that he did not suffer the pride that the people of Nazareth did.

Therefore, we must follow the example of St. Paul and not the example of the people of Nazareth or the nation of Israel in Ezekiel’s time. Pride is a dangerous vice to have. It can be very easy to reject God in our lives when He challenges us to become better people. We are often a people who do not like to listen to the hard truth. As we sometimes reject God when we sin, we must also expect that we are going to have to face rejection when we do live out the Christian message. Being a follower of Christ is counter-cultural. We must be determined to be faithful to the Gospel, not matter if we will be rejected by society or even our family and friends. Even Christ Himself was rejected by His hometown people.

We must ask God to bless us with the virtue of humility, so that we can accept His teaching and accept whatever hardships He gives us. Let us renew our own loyalty to Christ, and pray for those who reject Him. May they one day come to accept Christ, and may we always continue down the road that leads to the Kingdom.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

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

July 5th, 2009

「我幾時軟弱，正是我有能力的時候」(格後 12:10)

盧 嘉 勒

當聖保祿寫信給格林多人時，曾提到他獲得天主高超的啓示(格後 12:1-4)。但天主也允許他要抵受許多嚴厲的考驗，其中的一個還格外使他感到苦惱，不斷的折磨著他。這個考驗可能是一種疾病，一個令他肉體長期受到困擾的痛苦，除了使他感到格外煩厭，還會阻礙他的活動，使他徹底地體味到人性上的限制。

保祿不斷的祈求上主使他免除這份痛苦，直到他領悟到他要面對這個考驗的原因，即了解到在我們軟弱的時候，天主的德能才可以完全昭示出來，並且讓基督有更大的空間去彰顯祂的威能(格後 12:9)。

爲此，保祿能夠講出這句話：

「我幾時軟弱，正是我有能力的時候」

可是，人的理性卻反對這一種講法，認爲它是一個極明顯的矛盾，或是一個似是而非的說法。事實並非如此。這句話能夠表達基督信仰其中一個最大的真理。耶穌也曾以祂的生命，尤其是祂的死亡來解釋這句話的含意。

耶穌在甚麼時候實現了天父託給祂的使命？祂在甚麼時候救贖了人類？在甚麼時候戰勝了罪惡？就是當祂被釘在十字架上，感到天父的離棄而呼喊：「我的天主，我的天主，你爲什麼捨棄了我？」(瑪 27:46；谷 15:34)。

耶穌在祂最軟弱的時候，彰顯了祂最大的威能。

其實，耶穌都可以透過宣講，施行更多的奇蹟，或透過某些非同凡響的行爲表現，來建立天主新的子民。

但祂卻沒有這樣做。這是因爲教會是天主的工程，一切天主的工程必須並只有在苦難中才能開展起來。

因此，在我們軟弱和感到脆弱的時候，我們會找到一個獨特的機會，去體驗基督死而復活所帶來的力量，並且與保祿一起確認：

「我幾時軟弱，正是我有能力的時候。」

每個人都有軟弱、感到挫折和氣餒的時候。我們經常要忍受各種不同的痛苦，如逆境、疾病、死亡、心靈的考驗、誤會、誘惑、失敗等。在這些境況中，我們該做甚麼？爲能夠忠於基督的信仰，貫徹始終地把信仰實踐出來，我們必須相信這些痛苦是生命中最珍貴的時刻。

爲什麼？因爲正當我們無法克服肉體和靈魂的考驗，即我們不能夠依靠自己的力量去跨越困難時，我們便會全心信賴天主。

這份信賴將吸引天主介入我們的境況中。當天主工作時，祂會成就偉大的事，由於我們那麼渺小，更能彰顯天主的偉大。

因此，讓我們把自己的渺小和軟弱視作爲恩寵的時刻，使我們能夠給天主騰出空間，並從祂那裡找到一份力量，繼續「在絕望中仍懷著希望而相信」(羅馬書 4:18)，並以具體的方式繼續去愛。

以下是發生在瑞士一對夫婦身上的經驗。他們的兒子吸食毒品，但他們並沒有放棄，還四處替兒子尋找戒毒的方法，但總是白費的。一天，兒子再沒有回家了。在他們心裡充滿著罪惡感、恐懼、無能及羞恥。這是現代社會典型的創傷，但他們在這個創傷裡卻看見被釘基督的容貌，從而找到新的力量繼續去盼望和去愛。

當他們克服了無能的感覺後，整個家庭都感受到一份從未體驗過的內在力量，使他們更懂得開放自己，與其他人團結一致。他們組織了一些家庭，一起到蘇黎細一處號稱「毒品地獄」的地區(Platzspitz)，給青年癮君子送上三文治和茶水。一天，他們在那裡遇上他們的兒子，那時他衣衫襤褸。藉著他們和其他家庭的幫助，兒子終於戒毒成功，結束了他尋覓自由的漫長旅程。

摘自「生活聖言」