

## Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Reading 1

[Ez 2:2-5](#)

As the LORD spoke to me, the spirit entered into me  
and set me on my feet,  
and I heard the one who was speaking say to me:  
Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites,  
rebels who have rebelled against me;  
they and their ancestors have revolted against me to this very day.  
Hard of face and obstinate of heart  
are they to whom I am sending you.  
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.

### Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 123:1-2, 2, 3-4](#)

**R. (2cd) Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

To you I lift up my eyes  
who are enthroned in heaven —

As the eyes of servants  
are on the hands of their masters.

**R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

As the eyes of a maid  
are on the hands of her mistress,  
So are our eyes on the LORD, our God,  
till he have pity on us.

**R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

Have pity on us, O LORD, have pity on us,  
for we are more than sated with contempt;  
our souls are more than sated  
with the mockery of the arrogant,  
with the contempt of the proud.

**R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

### Reading II

[2 Cor 12:7-10](#)

Brothers and sisters:

That I, Paul, might not become too elated,  
because of the abundance of the revelations,  
a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan,  
to beat me, to keep me from being too elated.  
Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me,  
but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,  
for power is made perfect in weakness."  
I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses,  
in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me.

Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults,  
hardships, persecutions, and constraints,  
for the sake of Christ;  
for when I am weak, then I am strong.

## **Gospel**

[Mk 6:1-6](#)

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.

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# HOMILY

Last week, Fr. Tom Scirghi pointed out a theme in the Gospel of Mark, on which we are focusing in this year's cycle of readings. This theme concerned the different levels of acceptance of Jesus and his good news on both sides of the Sea of Galilee. On the Gentile, Greek, foreign side of the Sea, Jesus and his message were accepted and embraced. On the Jewish side, Jesus was greeted with skepticism. Fr. Tom posed the question, "on which side do we stand?"

Today's readings take us one step further in appreciating those different, opposing levels of acceptance. I want to explore a little bit further Fr. Tom's questions about our own responses to Jesus.

Last week, those mourning the death of the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue official, mocked Jesus' assertion that the girl was asleep not dead. This week, Jesus journeyed to his native place, and the neighbors he grew up with are even more dismissive of him. These people were astonished at Jesus' uppityness, took offense at him, and rejected both Jesus and his Gospel. Like

Ezekiel in the first reading, these neighbors of Jesus proved to be "hard of face and obstinate of heart." The home field was a disadvantage to belief.

On which side of the lake do we stand? Do we accept Jesus and believe in his message like the Gentile foreigners? Or do we amazingly lack faith like the hard hearted neighbors? I suggest we are like neither group. I think that we, like the Gentiles, say we believe in Christ, but that belief produces very little passion and minimal commitment to living the Good News as the highest priority in our lives. We are not as rejecting, offended, obstinate as Jesus' neighbors were. In fact, we are here in this Church right now. But our daily living only faintly supports a witness to any depth of belief.

For the most part, we are lukewarm to the important questions of life, because those questions can be so easily made irrelevant to our daily living. We are neither hot about Jesus like the foreigners on one side of the lake nor cold about his message like his co-religionist neighbors on the other side of the lake. We speak with forked tongue: on one side, expressing our belief in Jesus, and on the other not allowing that belief to make much difference in our life choices. We say we believe. We even come to Church most weekends which must be better than the self-described Catholics who never come to Church or only for Christmas and Easter.

But how deep does our belief effect the life choices of even most of us? We all want peace in the world, but how committed are we to "justice for all"? We all want greater security, an economy we can trust, more universal health care, better roads, sidewalks, parks, but are we willing to pay to support our collapsing structures and decaying infrastructures? We all want a vibrant parish-church community, but do we even reflect on the quality of stewardship of our God-given time, talent, and treasure?

At the risk of sounding callous, I think we all need a “thorn in the flesh” like St. Paul in the second reading. Scripture scholars speculate what that “thorn” might have been, but no one knows. For Paul, this thorn served the purpose of keeping him from being “too elated because of the abundance of the revelations,” from being too arrogant, too obstinate, too self-righteous. For some of us, the metaphor of “a thorn in the flesh” might work the way it did for Paul. For most of us, lukewarm, fork-tongued, passion-less believers, a thorn that reminded us of those limitations might prompt us to accept the Lord’s words to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

To be aware of our temptation to be apathetic about Jesus and his Good News may be the thorn we need to gain some passion in our belief. Obviously, the correct answer to where we should stand is with the Gentile/foreigners on

the other side of the lake and with their deep-seated belief in Jesus. Remember Jesus detested the lukewarm, the fork-tongued, the hypocrites. May this remembrance be a thorn in our flesh to remind us constantly that our professed belief in Jesus is important stuff. Truly, it is a matter of eternal life or death!

As we continue this service of thanks, let us praise God for calling to mind the blessing, the gift of “a thorn in the flesh” to keep us honest to our belief, and let us give God thanks by allowing such a thorn to allow us to stand embracing Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

***Rev. Timothy K. Johnson***