

# Sunday Readings



*The Adoption.* ( Mark 6 : 3 )

# 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

## 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

### ***about hosting the adopted Son of Joseph***<sup>1</sup>

#### introduction

In our lives, God speaks to us through people in whom the Word takes on human clothing. Today's texts present several cases of people sent by God. The quality of a gospel proclamation cannot be measured by its immediate acceptance. What's important is the fidelity of those sent to the mission entrusted to them. Today's texts mention Ezekiel, Paul and *the adopted Son of the carpenter Joseph*, i.e. Jesus. God gives each of them a specific mission, which is going to be effective, but effectiveness can take surprising pathways.

first reading: Ezekiel 2 : 1 – 5<sup>2</sup>  
prophet's role ]

[ about the

*The voice of someone speaking said to me: "O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you.(1) While he spoke to me, the Spirit entered me and put me on my feet. Then I heard the Lord speaking to me.(2) He said, 'Human being, I am sending you to the people of Israel. They are a nation of people who turned against me. They broke away from me. They and their ancestors have sinned against me until this very day.(3) And I am sending you to people who are stubborn. They do not obey. You will say this to them, 'This is what the Lord God says'.(4) The people may listen, or they may not. They are a people who turn against me. But whatever they do, they will know that a prophet has been among them".(5)*

The form of God addresses the prophet as, '*mortal man*'.<sup>3</sup> The priest Ezekiel was living in Babylonia – the land of the Chaldeans.<sup>4</sup> Thus he was remote from the Temple in Jerusalem which was the proper place for the exercise of his priestly duties. At the centre of Ezekiel's message is the Lord God's holiness. The holiness of the Lord includes God's complete freedom to walk away from the holy City.<sup>5</sup> The Lord God's holiness means that Israelite life must be ordered differently to the present. Jerusalem does not have enough claims to

---

<sup>1</sup> Cover image: The Adoption – Joseph the Carpenter and the Child Jesus – a window in St. Mary's parish Church, Wellsford, Auckland, designed by Tom Ruiterman, based on an eponymous bronze sculpture by Christopher Slatoff in the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles and blessed by the Bishop of Auckland, Bishop Pat Dunn on Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2021, to mark the Year of Joseph.

<sup>2</sup> The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

<sup>3</sup> [v.1] '*O mortal*' – is a formal way of saying simply, '*man*' – it is God's usual way of addressing the prophet throughout *the Book of Ezekiel*. It is most probable the title is used to emphasise the separation of the divine and the human.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ezk.1:3*

<sup>5</sup> *Ezk.9:3 & 10:15-22*

July 2024

guarantee anything against the disinterested holiness of the Lord. The Lord is tough and ruthless – and will leave and not look back.

Ezekiel's priestly role consists in helping his people to face the death (exile from Jerusalem) already a fact for people like himself, but yet to be realized by those who were still in nominal control of Jerusalem. Later he will announce hope of a new beginning and the receiving of new life (a return to Jerusalem) that will come only after the ending of the city and the old world of death. The period of his ministry spans the period of the destruction of Jerusalem, around 587 b.c.e.. The temple in Jerusalem was burned; the holy City destroyed; David's dynasty terminated; and the leading citizens joined Ezekiel in exile.

The narrative describes the early part of Ezekiel's ministry – before the breakup of 587 – when he knows he has a mandate to speak clearly on behalf of the holiness of the Lord. He knows that when such holiness is withdrawn it will cause the end of the old world. He's willing to voice this message and announce this ending at some risk from people who would rather not hear what he has to say. Ezekiel is mandated by a spirit,<sup>6</sup> from the Lord (v.2) to address all the people of Israel – and not only to those living in Judah – but Israelites based in the former northern kingdom that had collapsed under Assyrian pressure 130 years earlier, and those recently exiled in Babylonia. In so speaking the prophet is to voice the mis-match between the Lord's disinterested holiness and the stubborn refusal of all the Israelites to act righteously. The Lord's holiness translates into a call to righteousness (v.4). The prophet will repeatedly claim to speak, "*the Word of the Lord*". Even if people don't accept that word, they will at least know that a prophet has been sent and is among them (v.5).

response: Psalm 123 : 1 – 4

[ a

plea for mercy ]

*To You I lift up my eyes,*

*O You who are enthroned in the heavens!(1) As  
the eyes of servants look to the hand of their  
Master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of  
her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our  
God,*

*until he has mercy upon us.(2)*

*Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for  
we have had more than enough of contempt.(3) Our  
soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who  
are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.(4)*

A plea by the speaker on behalf of the whole community for deliverance from enemies. There are no details of the situation that provoked the plea. It is probably about the return of the exiles from Babylon, who find a ruined holy City and a neglected homeland. While expressing humble submission to the Lord's rule, the speaker is no slave to the Lord (v.2a).

---

<sup>6</sup> [v.2] 'Spirit' – Vital power, coming from God – which enables the prophet to hear the word of God; cf Ezk.8:3; 9:24; 11:1.

Rather, there's an anticipation of the Christian scriptures; John the evangelist speaks about, "*the Son who makes you free*",<sup>7</sup> and Saint Paul cries out confidently that the faithful are, "*no longer slaves, but sons or daughters*".<sup>8</sup> The eyes that are, "*lifted up to the Lord*" are secure in the knowledge of being loved. That's far from the furtive glance of an anxious servant. The plea ends in prayer – that the Lord relieve the people's humiliation at the hands of the arrogant hostile ones (vv.3–4). Hostile ones among the recolonisers, mocked efforts to rebuild.<sup>9</sup>

The speaker expresses the trust and submissiveness to the Lord's will, that buoys the hopes of 'remnant' Israel (v.2b). Today's readings (from Ezekiel, St. Paul and Mark) link this psalm with the role of a prophet. While the speaker in the psalm laments that the prophet and the prophet's message is treated with contempt and hostility, it clearly acknowledges that the Lord is in firm control. The appropriate response therefore, is submission to the Lord's will. Like Ezekiel, the psalmist acknowledges there are limits to a prophet's calling and responsibility beyond which the prophet is not expected to go. The prophet is not responsible for the mis-match between the Lord's holiness and the people's performance. That issue properly belongs to the Lord and the prophet is not to do God's work.

second reading: 2 Corinthians 12 : 7 – 10

[ Paul's visions

and revelations ]

*Even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.(7) Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me,(8) but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.(9) Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.(10)*

The apostle is in the thick of a controversy over false apostles, who were undermining his influence among the Corinthians. Earlier in the letter he had defended himself by mounting a vigorous attack on Christian preachers who have made their way to Corinth.<sup>101112</sup> These 'super apostles'<sup>11</sup> attacked Paul because he could boast no great achievements, nor had he received any exceptional spiritual experiences, nor was he responsible for any miracles! In response to these attacks, Paul begins to parody his opponents.<sup>12</sup> He boasts about the things that show his weaknesses and vulnerability, ending with a restatement in *chapter 12*, of his reluctance to boast, but nevertheless admitting, with tongue in cheek, that

---

<sup>7</sup> Jn.8:36

<sup>8</sup> Ga.4:7

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ne.2:19

<sup>10</sup> Cf. 2 Co.10-13

<sup>11</sup> Co.11:5

<sup>12</sup> Co.11:16ff

July 2024

he could boast about himself – but he won't (vv.5–7a). He knew of the heavenly realities; more so than any of his opponents, who boasted of their superior knowledge. With awareness of his mission sharpened and his confidence of God's reigning strengthened by his visions, he still could not tell what he had seen and heard. He is forced to learn about humility in spite of revelations, and about power in the face of powerlessness (vs.7–10). The hardships the apostle lists (v.10) may point to the nature of his battering by a suffering left him depressed.<sup>13</sup>

The apostle's frustration became a necessary condition for receiving *the power for life-giving*. Life at the end of one's tether is the setting for God's care. Christ's *power for life-giving* works best when all the disciple depends on has been knocked over. Paul 'delights' in this experience of vulnerability (v.10). If one accepts vulnerability for the right reasons – that is, for Christ's sake – then Christ's power is available to help the disciple to survive, build up faith and extend the reigning of God. As God's prophet, Paul carried the reality of his limitations into his prayer. He didn't try to hide them. Paul discovered that God's benevolence was not measured out in direct proportion to his own faultless performance of the good life. He says his vision told him that the power for life-giving reaches perfection in weakness (v.9). He's referring as well to Jesus, whose human limitations were no obstacle to *God's power for life-giving*. This lesson in human limitation is difficult one for us to absorb and understand; that God loves us, 'warts and all'.

gospel reading: Mark 6 : 1 – 6<sup>14</sup>

[ the rejection of

Jesus at Nazareth ]

*Jesus left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him.(1) On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!(2) Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him.(3) Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house."(4) And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.(5) And he was amazed at their unbelief.(6)*

<sup>13</sup> It might have been 'the thorn in the flesh' – a chronic depression commonly accompanying spells of extraordinary activity. Or the 'thorn' may have been some doubt or despair, or the effects of the ridicule and persecutions he encountered. According to the apostle, the assurance of Christ is stronger than the battering of the thorn (2 Co.12:2 & 10).

<sup>14</sup> In *Matthew*, after *the Sermon on the Mount*, the crowds are in admiring astonishment at Jesus' teaching (Mt.7:28); here the astonishment is of those who take offence at him. Familiarity with his background and family leads them to regard him as pretentious. Matthew modifies his Markan source (Mt.6:1-6). Jesus is not the carpenter but the carpenter's son (Mt.13:55), "among his own kin" is omitted (Mt.13:57 and "He did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief" (Mt.13:58) rather than Mark's "... And he could do no deed of power there..," (Mk.6:5) and Jesus is amazed at his town's people's lack of faith.

The ministry of Jesus is the energising that leads to radical beginnings at the very time when no new life seemed possible. The author presents Jesus as trustworthy. He's the one whose person made a difference. His words and actions were not without an abrasive effect. But for those who were open and received him, who allowed gifts to be given them and let their reality be reshaped; well they didn't notice the abrasiveness of his message. In fact it wasn't abrasion to them. The abrasion was against an old order, whose death they had long since faced and affirmed.

People noticed around Jesus, that life had been strangely and inexplicably changed. This newness happened in ways that didn't happen the way administered things happen. Mark is sensitive to the fact that *'hardness of heart'* can stop Jesus' work (v.5). Describing Jesus' return to his home territory the narrative underlines the point that where there is no belief Jesus could not energise. It was possible to resist the new energising. There were those who were free to embrace the newness and had no need to resist. The response of those who valued what is old, resisted. The conspiracy formed quickly. They wanted no new energy anyway. But the others who were open became aware of a staggering newness. More was going on here than they could understand or account for (vv.2-3a). No other gospel calls Jesus *'a carpenter'* (v.3). Some witnesses have *"the carpenter's son"*<sup>15</sup> as in, *'Son of Mary'*, contrary to Jewish custom which calls a man the son of his father.<sup>16</sup>

The saying, *'prophets are not without honour except in their home-town'* (v.4), finds parallels in other literatures, especially Jewish and Greek, but without reference to a prophet. Comparing himself to previous Israelite prophets, whom the people rejected, Jesus intimates his own eventual rejection by the nation especially in view of the dishonour his own relatives had shown him,<sup>17</sup> and now his townspeople as well. According to Mark, Jesus could not work any signs there because of the peoples' lack of faith (v.5). In his work and teachings – especially his healing work – Jesus had contradicted the norms of society concerning *'clean'* and *'unclean'*. He wasn't thanked for causing such a radical re-thinking about these fundamental characteristics of the Israelite tradition. He was calling in question all the moral distinctions upon which Israelite religion and society was based. If these foundation beliefs

---

<sup>15</sup> Mt.13:55

<sup>16</sup> This expression may reflect Mark's own faith that God is the Father of Jesus (Mk.1:1, 11; 8:38; 13:32; 14:36). *'The brother of James . . . Simon'* – in Semitic usage, the terms *'brother'*, *'sister'* are applied not only to children of the same parents, but to nephews, nieces, cousins, half-brothers, and half-sisters; cf Gn.14:16; 29:15; Lv.10:4. We cannot suppose that the meaning of a Greek word should be sought in the first place from Semitic usage. The Septuagint often translates the Hebrew *'ah'* by the Greek word *'adelphos'*, *'brother'*, as in the cited passages – a fact that may argue for a similar breadth of meaning in some New Testament passages. For instance, there is no doubt that in v.17, *'brother'* is used of Philip, who was actually the half-brother of Herod Antipas. On the other hand, Mark may have understood the terms literally. The question of meaning here would not have arisen but for the faith of the church in Mary's perpetual virginity.

<sup>17</sup> Mk.3:21

July 2024

were questioned, it jeopardised all those rules that justify political and economic inequality. for sharing: <sup>18</sup>

- *Ezekiel is called to be God's spokesperson. While people may not listen to him, he is not put off delivering God's Word. Comment on Ezekiel 2 : 2 – 5.*
- *Paul has experienced rejection. This is only part of his frustration. His attitude towards his afflictions, his own physical and mental sufferings, and those caused by others, sets a standard for all would-be disciples of Jesus. Comment on 2 Corinthians 12 : 7 – 10*
- *In the past the Israelites had ignored the prophets. Now their descendants refuse to listen to Jesus. Comment on Mark 6 : 1 – 6*

prayer: <sup>19</sup>

*God of the prophets,  
in every age you send the Word of Truth, familiar yet  
new, a sign of contradiction.  
Let us not be counted among those who lack faith, but  
give us the vision to see Christ in our midst and to  
welcome your saving Word. We ask this through  
our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in  
the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever. Amen.*

---

<sup>18</sup> Lectio Divina: reading God's Word in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us through reflection. The practise of *lectio divina* requires a quiet place, a passage of Scripture and the willingness to give time to the project. The passage used should be short. We suggest using all or part of the gospel readings of the up-coming Sunday. We let the Holy Spirit lead us to understand the words and allow our heart to speak to God in words inspired by the Scripture passage, or by the thoughts that have come to us while reflecting on it. Then we let go of ideas and words and allow ourselves to rest in the presence of God in simple and wordless contemplation. (See paragraph 153 The Joy of the Gospel – Pope Francis).

There are four steps in the traditional practise of lectio divina. The steps don't have to have the following order: lectio (reading) – read the passage of Scripture read slowly - more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down. meditatio (reflection) – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in God's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words. oratio (prayer) – allow your heart to speak to God, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it. contemplatio (rest) – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of God, in simple and wordless contemplation. This leaflet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday's liturgy. Familiarity with the texts and the commentary beforehand, can better prepare our hearing and understanding the passages in our worship. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'.

<sup>19</sup> The prayer that concludes the Lectio Divina is ICEL's 1998 opening prayer from the Proper of the Day. These prayers draw upon the concrete and vivid images of Scripture and conclude with a clearly focused petition inspired by the readings.

the review: <sup>20</sup>

*The purpose of worship is transformation. Our hearing of Mark's account of Jesus' teaching in his local synagogue and the experience of the people of Nazareth in meeting him, illustrates the dynamic of the Eucharistic liturgy where transformation can take place. This is not talk about some other meeting somewhere else. This dramatic moment intends that we who hear the Word of God and experience the Presence of God in the Eucharistic Prayer, should go away changed, perhaps made whole, perhaps subverted. This meeting intends transformation and a crucial question for us is, "How do we change?"*

*In the Eucharistic liturgy we are changed by the offer in Jesus of new images of how the pieces of life fit together! Our transformation is the slow steady process of accepting the invitation of Jesus into his story about God, our world, our neighbour and our self! This slow, steady process has as counterpoint the subversive process of unlearning and disengaging from a story that we find no longer credible or adequate. We yearn not for new doctrines or a new morality, but a new world, a new self, and a new future!*

-----oooOooo-----

---

<sup>20</sup> the review: – at the end of each reflection, the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, and provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the Word and EUCHARIST that we have previously heard and experienced.