

3rd February 2019 (Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Jeremiah 1:4-5,17-19; Psalm 70(71):1-6,15,17; 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13; Luke 4:21-30.

Jesus slipped through the crowd and walked away!

Do I really listen to the word of God, or do I try to control and convert God to my wishes? How open I am to repent and be converted?

This week's gospel passage continues on from last week's narration; Jesus goes to the synagogue, reads from the book of Isaiah, and declares that God was once again inviting his people to his year of favour and acceptance. God wanted to be with his people, the presence of Jesus, Son of God, was proof enough of this!

The people who were listening to Jesus were impressed at Jesus' words but instead of reflecting on the message being delivered, they started evaluating the messenger; after all he was just one of them! Jesus had grown up among them and they knew his parents and his relatives. They had heard about the miracles he had performed in Capernaum and now wanted to hold on to Jesus so that he could be their prophet.

Jesus was not happy with this attitude, he had come to proclaim the good news of God's year of favour to all peoples and could not afford to be cut down to size and controlled by a single village. His own townspeople and his own family had no more right over him and his preaching than everyone else had. Jesus also knew that his ministry would not have been accepted in Nazareth. Once he started to challenge their way of life people would have tried to stop him and push him back into his place, but one cannot place a light under the table, but on a lamp stand for all to see!

Quoting from their own scriptures, Jesus showed people how difficult it was for a prophet to preach to his own people. Both Elijah and Elisha had to leave their own people and go outside their country to find support. Obviously, the people of Nazareth were not impressed when this was pointed out to them, and tried to kill Jesus!

This incident at Nazareth becomes the model of Jesus' life. In the presentation in the temple, the prophet Simeon had told Mary and Joseph that Jesus would be a sign of contradiction. Moreover, looking forward at the way Jesus' life will develop, we know that many times he was rejected, until we come to the final rejection on the cross. Yet even there, the crowds could not control him, and he still walked away free!

The incident at the synagogue in Nazareth is a warning for each one of us. How often have I dismissed the message because I did not like the messenger? It is very easy to find something wrong with the messenger: he or she is either too old or too young, is either too conservative or too liberal, too funny or too serious, somehow I try to discount the messenger because then I believe I can disregard the message. What I forget is the fact that God's word is bigger than everything around me. I cannot throw away God's messages because God is stronger than anything else that can happen. I may metaphorically try to throw the messenger off the cliff, but I will never manage to stop God from speaking to me.

God speaks to me in many and various ways, at times in ways I least expect him to. Nothing prepared the shepherd to the news that they were going to find God in a manger! God reaches out each day and I need to be open to be able to listen to him and accept his message.

Fr Mario