

GOSPEL

Mark 6:1-6

Jesus went to his home town and his disciples accompanied him. With the coming of the sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, 'Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?' And they would not accept him. And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is only despised in his own country among his own relations and in his own house'; and he could work no miracle there, though he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

A REFLECTION OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

8 July 2012

I would like to reflect briefly on this Sunday's Gospel passage. It is taken from the text that has the famous saying "Nemo propheta in patria". In other words no prophet is properly accepted among his own people who watched him grow up (cf. Mk 6:4). Indeed after Jesus, when he was about 30 years old, had left Nazareth and had already been travelling about preaching and working miracles of healing elsewhere, he once returned to his birthplace and started teaching in the synagogue. His fellow citizens "were astonished" by his wisdom, and knowing him as "the son of Mary", as the carpenter who had lived in their midst, instead of welcoming him with faith were shocked and took offence (cf. Mk 6:2-3). This reaction is understandable because familiarity at the human level makes it difficult to go beyond this in order to be open to the divine dimension. That this son of a carpenter was the Son of God was hard for them to believe. Jesus actually takes as an example the experience of the prophets of Israel, who in their own homeland were an object of contempt, and identifies himself with them. Due to this spiritual closure Jesus "could do no mighty work there [Nazareth], except

that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them" (Mk 6:5). In fact Christ's miracles are not a display of power but signs of the love of God that is brought into being wherever it encounters reciprocated human faith. Origen writes: "as in the case of material things there exists in some things a natural attraction towards some other thing, as in the magnet for iron... so there is an attraction in such faith towards the divine power" (Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, 10, 19).

It would therefore seem that Jesus—as is said—is making sense of the negative welcome he received in Nazareth. Instead, at the end of the account, we find a remark that says precisely the opposite. The Evangelist writes that Jesus "marvelled because of their unbelief" (Mk 6:6). The astonishment of Jesus' fellow townspeople is matched by his own surprise. In a certain sense he too is shocked! Although he knows that no prophet is well accepted in his homeland, the closed heart of his people was nevertheless obscure and impenetrable to him: how could they fail to recognize the light of the Truth? Why did they not open themselves to the goodness of God who deigned to share in our humanity? Effectively Jesus of Nazareth the man is the transparency of God, in him God dwells fully. And while we are constantly seeking other signs, other miracles, we do not realize that he is the true Sign, God made flesh, he is the greatest miracle in the world: the whole of God's love contained in a human heart, in a man's face.

The One who fully understood this reality was the Virgin Mary, who is blessed because she believed (cf. Lk 1:45). Mary was not shocked by her Son: her wonder for him was full of faith, full of love and joy, in seeing him so human and at the same time so divine. Let us therefore learn from her, our Mother in faith, to recognize in the humanity of Christ the perfect revelation of God.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Considering those with power, authority, or a position of leadership, how do you discern whether they are "from God"?



Heart: Pope Benedict describes Jesus' actions in Nazareth as being not a display of power but a sign of the love of God. Why do we, as people, sometimes respond better to one more than the other (power or love)?



Hands: What are some ways we can attempt to recognise Jesus amongst us better this week?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.