

July 4, 2021

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ez 2:2-5

2 Cor 12:7-10

Mk 6:1-6

GROW: I'm struck by phrases in today's first and second readings: The prophet Ezekiel is told that those to whom he will be sent are "hard of face and obstinate of heart"; and Saint Paul aptly describes a "thorn in the flesh" as having been given to him. He even refers to this thorn as "an angel of Satan." These are descriptive images! So, I wondered, What do these images look like in practice? The Gospel gives us a clear example: those who grew up with Jesus refuse to see him as a prophet. At one time in my life, I might have said to myself: "Wow, I can't believe people of his own time would reject Jesus!" However, as I grow older, I'm conscious not only of more physical aches and pains, but the "thorn in the flesh" of patterns I'm not particularly proud of – cynicism, pessimism, even hard-heartedness and a closed mind. The "they" in today's readings hits closer to home and strikes me more as "we" than it used to. And yet, as Saint Paul reminds us, we can bring our imperfections to God and pray for grace to give us strength in our weakness, hearts open to God's love, and ears ready to hear the Gospel and be transformed by Jesus.

GO: When Jesus returned to his hometown, he was not exactly greeted like a "hometown hero." His contemporaries could see him only as a carpenter, and not the Messiah: "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." We know that Jesus went on to perform the mightiest of deeds – dying and rising from the dead. And yet, even today, he would be "amazed at our lack of faith." Today's Gospel and the other readings encourage us to do a check-up of our spiritual health and pray for the grace to continue to grow in faith. We can also pray for others who may be questioning or have lost their faith, inviting them to consider coming to church with us or simply offering to pray with and for them.

REFLECT: For a more intentional look at whatever thorns might be in your side, and what weaknesses those contribute to, consider doing a retreat. Attend an in-person retreat at a local retreat house, or look into online options for a guided retreat at home.