

Father Ed's Homily

14th Sunday In Ordinary Time

Theme: "A PROPHET IS NOT WITHOUT HONOR EXCEPT IN HIS NATIVE PLACE AND AMONG HIS OWN KIN AND IN HIS OWN HOUSE"

This saying of Jesus in today's Gospel reading that "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and his own house" reminds me of an old adage: "Familiarity breeds contempt." Geoffrey Chaucer, an English writer, was the first to use this proverb in his work "The Tale of Melibee" in 1300s. Those who agree with this saying claim the more you know of the private life of someone, you may be tempted to belittle/think lowly of him/her.

Beloved, Jesus did many great things and was accepted in Capernaum and elsewhere, except in his own hometown, Nazareth. When Jesus came back to Nazareth, his native place, his own people rejected and refused to recognize him and his mighty deeds. It is painful to be rejected but more painful/hurtful from your own people. Remember, your severe critics are often the very people who are familiar to you. They wondered where Jesus got this great wisdom and where he got this power to do these mighty deeds. Listen to what they said about him: "Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, and Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" The terms "Brother" and "Sister" in Semitic usage are applied not only to children of the same parents but also to nephews, nieces, cousins, half-brothers, and half-sisters (Genesis 14:16; 28:15 & Leviticus 10:4). Beloved, Mary never had children except for Jesus Christ. She remained a virgin throughout her earthly life. Jesus' hometown folks dislike/hatred for him can also be seen in their description of him as "Son of Mary." According to Jewish custom, children were known by their father's name; for instance, "Son of Joseph," and not by their mother's name, "Son of Mary." So, by their referring to Jesus as Son of Mary may be considered, an insult to Jesus. His hometown folks rejected him and refused to acknowledge his mighty deeds simply because for them, Jesus comes from a 'low class of society.' His mom, Mary, was a housewife, a country girl, and his foster dad, Joseph, was a carpenter. Jesus also learned the trade of his foster father, hence they addressed him as a carpenter. His native townspeople would have accepted him if Jesus had learned from some famous teachers/scholars of the law of the time and if his parents came from the upper class of society, namely top Synagogue officials, doctors, scribes, lawyers, etc. This may explain the reason why some people have to go away from their hometown to blossom, shine, and not because there are no well-paying jobs in town. It is said, "Our greatest assets are often overlooked because familiarity breeds contempt."

Fellow parishioners, who are we to set limits and boundaries to what another person is capable of achieving? It is unfortunate that you may sometime find similar attitudes of Jesus' hometown folks in our own towns where we do not accept great folks simply because we claim we know of their humble origins. Today, just like the days of Jesus, some people are not accepted and recognized simply because of their political ideology, culture, gender orientation, live in certain areas, have certain professions, look different from us. We may consider them not normal or low class. Lord, have mercy! We often forget that we are created in the image and likeness of God and that God has blessed us with different gifts and talents.

In the first and the second readings, Ezekiel and Paul were also rejected, just like Jesus Christ. Ezekiel, whose name means "God, My Strength," was a priest and was among the first deportees from Jerusalem to Babylon in 597 BC. It was in Babylonian exile that God called him to be a prophet to his people. God revealed to Ezekiel that his main mission was to make his own people, the Israelites, know there is a prophet among them. He must challenge them to return to God and follow God's directives. Again, Ezekiel, like Jesus, was not accepted by his own people. Paul, in the second reading, also encountered a similar situation like Ezekiel and Jesus. The false preachers in Corinth polluted the minds of the Christians in Corinth to reject Paul. Paul never gave up his missionary work in the midst of his sufferings and persecutions. Through this "thorn in the flesh," Paul learned the virtue of humility and allowed this experience to help him embrace God's grace for his missionary work. Like Paul, we must not allow our weaknesses and sufferings to prevent us from doing God's works. It is a moment of grace to learn from it, and we must endeavor to live a life in accordance with the Gospel message of Christ always.

As we celebrate July 4th weekend, let us continue to thank and praise God for blessing us with this great country. Let us pray for the men and women in the uniform and all those who have contributed or are contributing to make this country great and proud. God Bless America! Have a blessed July 4th holiday.