

14B SML 2018
MK 6:1-16

When Our Blessed Lord declared Himself to be the Son of God and One with His Heavenly Father, His enemies either rejected Him, or made attempts on His life. When He told his Apostles that He must be crucified and be a suffering Son of Man, they quarreled either with Him or among themselves for the first place in His kingdom.

Worldly men want nothing to do with divinity or a suffering Savior – divinity because man would prefer to be his own god, and suffering, because man would prefer the easy way out. Our Blessed Lord became a stumbling block when He humiliated Himself to the human level, taking on the form and the habit of man. It is hard for the “intelligent” to believe that Greatness can be so little, and God can be so human. Then again, Our Blessed Lord became a stumbling block after He became man when He did not use His divine power and come down from the Cross.

Our Blessed Lord was rejected many times during His life. The first place He was rejected was in His home town of Nazareth. Such is the background for this evening’s (morning’s) gospel.

As Friday's sun was setting on the town of Nazareth that was settled in the cup of hills, the trumpet blast from the master of the synagogue proclaimed the beginning of the Sabbath. The following morning, Our Blessed Lord went to the synagogue, where He had often been as a child and as a young man. By this time, the news had reached Nazareth of His first miracle at Cana, where He turned water into wine, as well as at His Baptism where the voice of the Father was heard and the Holy Spirit was seen in the form of a dove, by the River Jordan; hence the remark, "What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands!" Expectancy was in the air. Coupled with the expectancy of a miracle was His teaching, which astonished them. "Where did he get all this?"

So a choice had to be made: either they could believe or they could reject. To believe would mean not only to believe in God, but to believe in God:

- ✓ Who touched their neighborhood,
- ✓ Who ate at their kitchen tables,
- ✓ and Who lifted hammers in the same trade shop.

Or they could reject Him with the same snobbery that was found in the exclamation of Nathanael, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Since today's Gospel said they took

offense at Him, rejection was what they chose. He was the son of a carpenter, but he was also the Son (capital S) of the Carpenter (capital C) Who (capital W) made heaven and earth.

And as a result, Our Blessed Lord was amazed at their lack of faith. Twice does the Gospels say Our Blessed Lord was amazed: once because of a centurion's strong faith, and here because of His own townsmen's lack of faith. From His own townspeople He might have found some touch of sympathy, some predisposition toward Him, but He did not.

A prophet is not without honor, except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house.

The people of Nazareth "thought" they knew Our Blessed Lord. In their estimation, He was just one of them, a day laborer turned preacher. Since He did not belong to a priestly class or have an extensive formal education in Jerusalem like other religious leaders, most could not believe Our Blessed Lord was anything special, in spite of the stories about Him that increased their expectations. And as a result, He could not do much to help them. Why? Because Our Blessed Lord is a perfect gentleman. He'll knock but will not enter unless you open the door.

What a powerful, but what a sad statement. “He was not able to perform any mighty deeds there, apart from curing a few who were sick.” A lack of faith actually prevented Our Blessed Lord from helping as He would like.

We are people of faith. And how many times have I said from this pulpit, how many times have I said one on one, “God has this, whatever this is, and He will give you the grace.” He has and He will because we are people of faith. And where would we be without faith?

And for those who just go through the motions, he could not help them.

I was back to a former parish as one of my former altar boys was married and he asked me to perform the wedding. A lovely, lovely couple. During the cocktail hour, I met up with Aunt Helen. As I bellied up to the bar to order a coca cola, Aunt Helen bellied up to the bar to order a double scotch straight up. Her order caught my attention. Her appearance followed suit. I’ll spare you the details, but I’ll start with her silver sequene dress that was too small for her size and her age, and finish with her cigarette on a stem. “Lovely service Father . . . you know, I’m very religious. But I stopped going to Church when they stopped the Latin Mass. I loved the Latin Mass. You know

I had a vocation. I was supposed to go into the convent . . . yada, yada, yada.” And it occurred to me on the way home that people like Aunt Helen lived in Nazareth at time of Our Blessed Lord in this evening’s/morning’s gospel – people who would have liked to be religious or claim to be religious, but instead, among other things, belly up to the bar to order a double scotch straight up.

This week we celebrated Independence Day. We celebrated liberty; we celebrated freedom. More and more, today’s culture believes freedom means doing whatever you want. More and more, freedom means freedom from God and what God wants us to do or not do. More and more, people are taking religion less seriously. 46% of respondents told a 2011 survey¹ that they never wonder whether they will go to heaven. The new group is not atheists, who believe there is no God, not agnostics, who believe you cannot prove or disprove there is a God, but apatheists, who believe there is a God, but who cares? This way, we no longer belong to God, we can do as we please.

Today, take pause to be religious, to pray to be more religious, and to pray for those who are not at all religious.

¹ by Nashville-based evangelical research agency, LifeWay Research

Take pause to be grateful to God, from Whom we have received our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Liberty is synonymous to freedom. Take pause to pray that this great land will always be “one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”