

As a child, I was fortunate to have some really good positive role models in my life. I knew I was loved and I was encouraged to dream, to love God, to study hard, and importantly, to enjoy life. My great-grandfather, whom I affectionately called papa, had a huge impact on me. When I was with him, I knew that I was loved, that I was special.

That's how Jesus made others feel. In our gospel reading today, we find Jesus teaching in the synagogue and the people were amazed because it was unlike anything they had ever heard. Jesus inspired people to change, not out of fear, but out of love. Jesus was able to see through all the superficial facades people put on and touch them at the core of their being and draw out their inner beauty and goodness. He didn't judge people; he simply loved them. That's the example he left for you and for me.

As Jesus began his ministry, people wanted to be near to him, to listen to him, to touch him, to walk with him. It seemed like Jesus was the answer to a long-awaited promise. But we all know how the story ends – how people changed. The once loved Jesus became a threat – a threat to the establishment, to the church, and to those who liked the status quo. Overnight people went from waiving palm branches singing hosanna to shouting crucify him.

You see, Jesus spoke the truth and he challenged people to change. As we all know, change isn't easy – but Jesus is calling us, you and me, to change. We are challenged to cast off all that holds us back from being people of love, much like he cast out the demons in the gospel story.

We're challenged to change how we look at ourselves. Rather than seeing our faults and flaws, we are called to see ourselves as being holy, worthy of dignity and respect. We are called to silence the voices of negativity and self-doubt that often fill our heads.

We are challenged to change how we see others – the person sitting next to you, or the person who cut you off in traffic; the person standing on the street corner or in line at the store, the person with whom we disagree, as also being precious in God's eyes and loved without measure. As Mother Teresa said, "When you judge others, you have no time to love them."

We are challenged to see the world through our faith in Jesus – with eyes of love and compassion. We are called to take time to thank God for all the wonderful gifts we have been given. We are called to trust in God, to have confidence that we are loved beyond measure. As St. Paul said in our second reading – do not be afraid; don't be anxious. You see, Jesus taught us it's not about following a set of rules, but rather, it's about love; it's about our attitude – that's what matters.

In our baptism, each one of us was anointed as priest, prophet, and king. When we were anointed priest, each of us was given the responsibility to be holy – to love God. To be thankful for the gifts we've received and to return the love we receive to the world around us. We are given the task of seeing the good in others, to see the face of God reflected in our own mirror as well as in the face of all who walk this journey through life.

As prophets, we are called to stand up and speak courageously in the face of injustice, even when it's not popular. When we remain to the plight of the oppressed, to those being bullied or scapegoated, when we remain silent when others are discriminated or taunted, when we fail to protect the environment or animals from abuse, we turn away from God. As prophets we have the responsibility to be a voice calling for justice and peace; a voice calling for change.

As Kings we are called to act with justice, to see the dignity in each person we encounter. We are called to help bring the reign of God to reality here on earth. We are called to teach and preach, to heal and share, to love and to inspire with words of encouragement. We are called to suspend judgment and build people up rather than knock them down.

I so remember my papa for all the love and kindness he showered on me. He made a real difference in my life not by preaching, but by loving. Think of a person in your own life who inspired you, who loved you without measure – be that person for others. Be the change the world so desperately needs.