

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's readings introduce Jesus as a prophet and explain how prophets and other messengers from God inevitably suffer rejection. The readings challenge us to face rejection and hardship with prophetic courage.

The story of Jesus' rejection in his own town is a story that we can identify with, because it is a story that has happened to most of us. We might have experienced the pain of rejection caused by hurts, wounds, betrayal, divorce, abandonment, violated trust, trauma, neglect or various forms of abuse. What about the rejection by those closest to us? Often our friends, families, or childhood companions fail to listen to, and refuse to accept, the words of grace, love and encouragement that we offer to them, because, they are too familiar with us. So, they are unable to see us as God's appointed instruments, the agents of God's healing and saving grace. Let us check also the other side of the coin. How often do we discount God's agents through prejudice? How often do we fail to see God's image in them because of our own hardheartedness? We must realize that God's power is always available to transform even the most unlikely people.

We can handle rejection with respect – respect for ourselves and respect for others. Our first reaction to rejection is anger at ourselves for assuming we deserve what we got and bitterness toward others, who perpetuate the rejection. In the face of rejection, we will be wise to follow the advice of St. Paul who said, “Be angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down on your anger.”

We need to avoid self-defeating assumptions. One rejection need not be an accusation on one's life. Rejection is not a continuous failure. We need to avoid magnifying the rejection. Rejection need not be a forecast of our future, and it must not become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rejection in the past need not be a predictor of rejection in the future. We need to avoid allowing rejection to derail our dreams and instead to keep coming back. We need to learn from our rejections. We are not perfect, and we do not always get it right, but we need to keep coming back until we get it right. Every rejection can be a lesson, if we stay open to new

possibilities and new opportunities. What can I do differently? How can I improve? What needs can I meet? These are the questions, we need to ask, if we are to prevent a trouble from going to waste.

Let us acknowledge the prophets of God's goodness in our midst. God is giving us his message through our nearest and dearest and our neighbors and coworkers. Since God uses them as His prophets to convey His message to us, it is our duty to acknowledge and honor them. Let us express our appreciation today for our families – spouses for each other, parents and children for each other. A word of appreciation for the one who cooks the dinner, for the neighbor who is always ready to share our happiness and sorrow, for the friends who have given us time, support and attention during sadness or a tragedy in our life. Let us not take for granted the presence of God among us as evidenced by the goodness shown by family and friends. Let us also recognize God's direction, help and support in our lives through His words in the Bible and through the advice and examples of others.

We must have the prophetic courage of our convictions: By our Baptism, God calls us to be prophets like Jesus, sharing his prophetic mission. The task of a prophet is to speak God's truth. We must never be afraid of this call. We may rely on Jesus to supply us with the courage to oppose the many evils in our society, it can be Abortion, Drugs, Gun culture and alcohol and so on. So, our country needs Christians with the prophetic courage and convictions to fight against such moral evils.

We need to speak the truth of Christ with love, never being hypocritical or disrespectful. Jesus taught us to give respect and freedom without excusing or encouraging sinful behavior. Love does not tolerate destructive behavior but, nevertheless, it sometimes causes pain just as a surgeon must sometimes hurt in order to heal. We can be kind, charitable, and honest and forgiving, as we speak forth our own convictions as Jesus did in the synagogue.

Let us also acknowledge, appreciate and encourage the prophets of our time, who stand for truth and justice in our society with the wisdom of God in their heads, the power of the Holy Spirit in their words and the courage and love of Jesus in their actions.