

## Trinity VI- Year B -14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Prophets and prophecy have always been part of the heritage of the people of Israel. The prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures were charged with the difficult task of speaking God's words to a people who did not always want to hear their message, often a difficult message about their own failings. The prophet Ezekial is told by God that he is sending him to the Israelites, the rebels who have turned against God; and that they and their ancestors have transgressed against God, they are impudent and stubborn. Ezekial is sent to this rebellious house to speak the message of God, whether they hear or refuse to hear!

Prophets are not so much people who foretold the future, but those who had a clear understanding of what God wanted and called the people back to fidelity to God's commandments and covenant when they had strayed. A good definition of a prophet is "a person who upholds the holiness of God" – A prophet reminds the people, of the holiness of God and the command of God to his people to be holy after him! God says **"You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy"** Leviticus 21:8, Exodus 19:6, 1 Peter 1:16.

We all share in the Prophetic Role of Christ Jesus in and through our Baptism. We are commanded by God to uphold his holiness, to speak the truth of God in love to all peoples, whether they listen or not, whether they accept the message or reject it, whether we are welcomed or opposed! Today, Jacob and Elizabeth are baptised into Christ and welcomed into the family of God! So, from

today both Jacob and Elizabeth share in Jesus' Prophetic Mission, his prophetic calling to uphold the Holiness of God, both in their own lives, and invite people to share in this holiness.

Our **Gospel** from Mark 6:1-6 describes Jesus' return to his hometown Nazareth. He is accompanied by his disciples, who are now beginning to constitute his "new family", distinct from the members of his original family listed here. As Jesus says elsewhere, his mother, brothers, and sisters hear the word of God and Keep it!

However, when on the Sabbath day Jesus begins to teach in the synagogue, and his former townspeople are amazed at the authority and wisdom of his words. In a sense, they ask the right question, "Where did the man get all this?" But the condescending tone ("the man") already signals rejection. Had they pondered a little longer on the "where" (or "whence"), they might have begun to arrive at the right solution: that the authority and wisdom Jesus is displaying comes from his empowerment with the Spirit of God (Mark 1:10); the Holy Spirit is given to each of us at Baptism!

Instead, the Nazarenes immediately seek to put him back into the box of their previous knowledge of him: he is the carpenter and, yes, they know and can list all the members of his family. With this, they can be comfortable. Impossible that one of them, one so familiar, could really be a Prophet sent from God to instruct them. Small-town prejudice and narrow-mindedness distort the perception of the reality that is there before them, forcing Jesus to repeat about

Nazareth the saying, **“The only place where prophets are without honour is in their own hometown, . . .”** Sometimes the enemy to faith can simply be ‘familiarity’ – a refusal to believe that God’s power and presence could come to us in so familiar a form as the person next door!

What is remarkable here is how the Gospel so frankly records Jesus’ helplessness to do any deeds of power for his townspeople because of their lack of faith. **Faith or the lack of it *conditioned* his power to help.** Put it more positively; it is faith that allows God’s power to be effective in our world, as pointed out in last week’s Gospel stories and miracles.

The Nazarenes had their own fixed ideas as to when and where and how the Messiah should come to Israel – and the one they knew as the local carpenter simply didn’t fit the bill. So the only place that really missed out on Jesus’ works of power and miracles was his own hometown, what an irony!

**Progress in the spiritual life – growth in the Spirit – almost always shows itself in the ability to recognize God more and more in the ordinary, the everyday.** This is why the great saints never stopped wondering – being filled with wonder at the mysterious presence of God they constantly sensed all around them. The full meaning of the Incarnation is not only that the Son of God became a human being but that he took human form in a town as ordinary and

insignificant and out of the way as Nazareth. Perhaps we have to identify and name “the Nazareth” in our own selves!

Together with St. Paul who learned that ‘when he is weak, then he is strong’, all of us who are baptized need to remind ourselves that we have been anointed with a prophetic call for our times. We have been called by name and anointed with the Holy Spirit to uphold the commandments of God and uphold the holiness of God. We all have our fair share of trouble – ‘a thorn in the flesh’ as St. Paul puts it, but God’s grace will always be sufficient. Whatever, it was, the ‘thorn’ that God would not take away became a key aspect of St. Paul’s spirituality and sense of God’s grace. He was sent out as a Prophet and Apostle to the nations with his own struggles. Similarly, each of us together with Elizabeth and Jacob, is called to fulfill our Prophetic Calling in Christ Jesus, no matter what objections and obstacles come our way– Speak the truth of God with Courage and Love; and Uphold his Holiness in our lives and invite others to join the family of God! Amen.