

Homily Mark 6:1-6

“The Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet.” Ezekiel reminds us that without the Holy Spirit, without grace, without the energy that is God’s gracious gift, faith-life is not possible, inner transformation is not possible, change is not possible, the movement into the wholeness that God offers is not possible. This sets us up for the events in today’s Gospel. Jesus had spent the best part of thirty years in Nazareth, a town so tiny that it wasn’t even on the map in His time. Jesus was known by everyone as a carpenter, the Son of Mary. However, since leaving Nazareth, Jesus’ life had taken a new direction. Jesus previously left His hometown of Nazareth and had thrown himself into the work that God had given Him to do. He had left Nazareth as a carpenter; He returned as a teacher and a healer. The people of Nazareth thought they knew Jesus. The image they had of him as the hometown boy, the carpenter and craftsman, became a roadblock to their learning more about him.

This event in the life of Jesus begins with astonishment and ends with amazement. “Many who heard Him were astonished.” The hometown people are astonished at Jesus’ ability to reveal God and Jesus is amazed. He is amazed at their inability, their unwillingness to respond enthusiastically to His revelation. Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith...and this lack of faith is why Jesus couldn’t perform many miracles in Nazareth.

Sometimes we think that miracles and blessings should be given to us to inspire us to believe...to remove any uncertainty about who Jesus is. If we just say that one fervent prayer, we will immediately be granted our wish, our desire. The opposite is the reality. First, Christ appeals to us on a personal level, as a friend: inviting us to come and follow Him, to get involved in His Kingdom and to let Him get involved in our lives. Jesus invites, He never compels. Jesus appeals to the heart, by showing love and by speaking the truth. But if we refuse His advances like those in today’s Gospel, He will leave us free to go our own way. Jesus wants followers that are friends not slaves. He wants a kingdom of freedom and not bondage. Jesus wants us to follow Him out of love, not fear. He does not want us to only turn to Him when we have a need. Jesus calls us to follow God’s will.

Today we should ask ourselves, what invitations has God been sending to our hearts, and how have we been responding? Has He been speaking through our conscience, inviting us to give up some sinful, selfish habit and accept His forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation? Has He been speaking through circumstances and inspirations, inviting us to follow Him more closely through the vocation God has called us to? Has he been nudging us to do something for the Church or for our neighbors?

Today's Gospel shows us that there can be no preaching in the wrong atmosphere. In an atmosphere of expectancy, the poorest effort, the weakest homily, can catch fire. In an atmosphere of critical coldness or blind indifference, as Jesus experienced in His hometown, the most spirited message can fall lifeless. The words, no matter how inspired, will fall to the ground like lead weights or dissipate into the air like wisps of smoke.

There can be no peacemaking in the wrong atmosphere. As Jesus witnessed, if those gathered together have come to hate, they will hate. If they have come together to refuse to understand, they will misunderstand. If they have come to see no other point of view but their own, they will see no other point of view. But if they have come together, loving Christ and seeking to love each other, even those who have become widely separated from Him can come together in Him. This did not happen in Nazareth.

The rejection of Jesus might be traceable to the "pitfall of familiarity." To the people of Nazareth Jesus was so familiar, so ordinary, so common. Familiarity put a glaze over the eyes of the townspeople and kept them from seeing the greatness of their native Son. We too can slip into the pitfall of familiarity. We have heard the words of Jesus so many times before. We have heard the stories, heard the parables before. Our senses can glaze over too. The challenge for us is to break through the familiar, to make the Good News new again... to know and proclaim Jesus to a world that has yet to know Him. To proclaim Jesus to a world that is trying to force Him out. We have a tremendous responsibility. We can help the work of Christ, or we can hinder it. As the Body of Christ, we must stand up and be counted. Stand up for values and principles we hold dear. Prophets may or may not be accepted among their own people, but silence is not always the answer. We need to speak the truth. We need to keep the faith...we must keep the faith.

God is a lover. He seeks to give His love to those who freely accept it and open their hearts to Him. He refuses to violate the wishes of those whom He has created in His image and likeness, who possess intellect and free will. He directly controls the wind and the waves with a simple command because wind and waves are inanimate objects. Human beings are different. We have been given the gift of free-will. Regarding human beings, Jesus makes Himself available and waits for an invitation. That invitation, whereby we ask Him to come into our lives and calm our interior storms, is called faith. Faith is not an emotion. Faith is a decision. It is a “yes” that gives God permission to work in our lives.

Sometimes we are not happy with the way things are, but at least we feel somewhat comfortable. We know what to expect. We are in control, or at least we think we are. Faith means handing over control, and that scares us. We are free to say no, and quite frankly, we often do say no. Sometimes we say no in small ways—we only let God take us so far. Sometimes it’s a very firm “no” that shuts God completely out of our lives. This is the sort of “no” that Jesus encountered during His visit to Nazareth. It was the same “no” the prophets before Him received.

Today, as Jesus renews His commitment to us in this holy Mass, let's listen closely to His voice in our hearts, and courageously follow wherever He leads us letting Him unleash the full power of His grace. As we prepare to receive our Blessed Lord in the Eucharist, let us examine our lives. Let us identify the times we were like those in Nazareth...the times we refused to recognize the Lord; refused to let Him into our hearts and into our lives. As we approach the Table of the Lord, let us apologize, beg His forgiveness, unbolt the door of our hearts, roll out the red carpet and fully invite Jesus in. It is only with Jesus in our hearts that we can fully be the Body of Christ, the Church of mercy, compassion, and equipping that Jesus intended.