

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time-B

The second reading for today is written by a troubled man. The reading itself is troubling for us. In St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, he writes about a thorn in the flesh that he suffered from. Three times he begged the Lord to remove this from Him. But all he heard was the Lord saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." What was it that was upsetting St. Paul so much? People have speculated over the years, but we have no way of knowing. Whatever it was, it was significant for Paul. It could not have been something as minor as a speech impediment as some have speculated. Nor could it have been his caustic temper. It was something far more personal and even more severe. It probably kept him awake at night.

It is troubling for us to think about the great St. Paul having a major personal problem. Even in our cynical age, we still want to turn our saints into perfect little plastic statues. But people are not perfect, and even the greatest of the saints were people like you and me, continually fighting our own tendencies to sin.

The voice of the Lord told Paul that His Power, the Lord's Power, is made perfect in weakness. It was clear to Paul that the wonders of the Lord that took place through his ministry only occurred because God was working through him. He went on to write in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

It is easy for people to get so bogged down with their own concept of what the minister of the Lord should be like that they miss the Word of God he preaches. It is also easy for all of us to get so bogged down with the recognition of our own sinfulness that we refuse to allow the Lord to use us for His purpose on behalf of others.

In the first reading Ezekiel is told that the people would not want to hear the Word of God which the Lord told him to proclaim. But that did not lessen the fact that it was still the Word of God. Perhaps Ezekiel was strange to them. Certainly he seemed to be unconventional. He shocked people with many of his prophetic actions. They laughed at him. They derided him. But his words came true. Instead of looking at the man speaking, they should have listened to what he was saying.

The same thing happened to Jesus as related in today's Gospel. Jesus was in Nazareth, the place where he grew up. The people were his neighbors. They knew him since he was a small boy. They were so bogged down in their knowledge of Jesus and his humanity that they refused to listen to the Word of God that He was proclaiming and that He was in His very own person. Their lack of faith resulted in Jesus not being able to perform any of the mighty deeds of God among them.

We often make the same mistake. Some people seem too ordinary to us to be vehicles of God's truth. They may be our parents or our children, our neighbors or our companions at work or school. They proclaim a truth that could change our lives, but we don't want to hear it. Who does he think he is? Who does she think she is? We become so stuck on the humanity of the proclaimer that we refuse to listen to the truth of their words.

Perhaps what is even worse is when we are so overwhelmed with our own sinfulness that we refrain from proclaiming the Lord. Some adults view themselves in such a negative way that they refuse to lead their children properly. "Who am I to tell my child not to do this or that, when I know that I often do far worse things?" And as such the Word of God and His truth is not proclaimed. And children think that they have implicit approval from their parents to do things their parents do not discuss openly and honestly. (Premarital sex, cohabitation, and artificial contraception, to mention a few.)

Paul was told that Christ's power is made perfect in his weakness. Paul realized that it was God working through him that brought so many people to the faith. Christ's power also works through us. We really don't have the right to deny our responsibility to the Lord. We may think that we are not good enough to talk about the Lord, but we are good enough. He makes us good enough through His grace. Furthermore, the positive effects of what we say and do come from the Lord, not from us.

So we come before the Lord today and say with Ezekiel, St. Peter, St. Paul and so many of the saints, "I am sinful, I cannot do your work" and Jesus says, "Yes you can." My power will work through you in ways greater than you can ever imagine. And you will know that it is me working, not you. My power is made perfect in your weakness.

- Fr. David M. Chiantella