

Rejection of God's Mission

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”. Note that the first word spoken by the public Jesus in Luke's Gospel, other than the reading of Isaiah, is “today” -not yesterday, not tomorrow, not someday. The time of divine action is always now. This today continues throughout Jesus' ministry. Now is always the time to release the captives, to give sight to the blind, to free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Jesus's mission is focused and specific, and it is rooted in the deep identity of his people and his tradition. He is describing his mission as something to fulfill the tradition not to replace it.

Today's Gospel continues the story that we heard last week. But whereas last week's Gospel left the congregation of the synagogue marvelling at the grace that came from Jesus lips (they were amazed), this week they turn against him. They asked Jesus to do something like he did in Capernaum. His response is that “No prophet is ever accepted in his own country”, Jesus tells them, but it is clearly something more than Jesus the man that is being rejected here. It is what he stands for, what he represents.

How could a hometown Jesus – Joseph's son – claim to be God's anointed agent? They do not believe his identity claim. They have not experienced any good news, release, or favor. Jesus will need to demonstrate same healings and “releases” before they believe. Jesus refuses to perform such acts, because they have not discerned his identity. Jesus refuse to manifest God's favor in their town. He is not primarily “son of Joseph” but Son of God. They know the former but not the latter.

Irrationally, part of the reason for Jesus's rejection by the people is their possessiveness. The people of Nazareth are envious of what Jesus has done for others in Capernaum. And they want to keep him to themselves, so that they can share his glory. The universal love of God is too much for them.

The good news of love is also hard news; it requires us to change our ways. Jesus enrages, provokes the people by recalling of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. They shared God's favor with Gentiles but not with Israel, suggesting that God's favor had been withheld from Israel. The hometown people express anger that Jesus seems to exclude Nazareth from God's favor, loving actions, grace, mercy.

Elijah was one of the most celebrated of Israel's prophets: Sirach says that he ‘arose like a fire, and his word burned like a torch’ (48:1). He mentions Elijah's miraculous gift

of food to a widow of Zarephath, a foreigner, Samaritan. Then, he recalls Elisha's healing, not of any of the numerous lepers of Israel, but of Syrian, Naaman. Naaman was not only a foreigner, but the commander of an enemy army. Jesus' God was healing all the wrong people. This is what made the people of the synagogue so angry.

Jesus is here announcing his mission: he came to save all of us. He will become a rejected prophet himself. Jesus says that God's grace and power will benefit outsiders, even Gentiles. The people were "filled with rage" because Jesus proclaimed a grace that was wider and more generous than they were. They found themselves helpless to harm the Son of God. This episode is a kind of picture of the whole of Christ's life and mission. Jesus is sent, he is welcomed, then rejected, then killed, and he is still within our midst.

Jesus shows the truth of Saint Paul's words in the Epistle: "Love endures all things ... Love never fails." The refusal of Jesus is an eloquent statement of the indestructibility of God's love. God's supreme, invincible love cannot be destroyed by hatred or sin, even of rejecting Jesus. It is this love we receive in the Eucharist.

In the first reading the Lord tells Jeremiah, 'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.' In other words, 'I loved you.' It is a mission of love for which Jeremiah is consecrated. God's love explains his existence. But like Jesus whom he foreshadows, Jeremiah's mission of love will be rejected by his people.

Jesus has already announced his mission of love by quoting the words of Isaiah, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord'.

We are living in that year of the Lord. Even though love is rejected again and again, it does not flee. God's love remains unconquered and is always with us in the person of Jesus, especially in the Eucharist. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Love can endure all things, even our rejection of it.

Jesus' inaugural message is also a call to those who would follow to join in his work of healing, liberation, and grace. As Holy Family parish today, we are crafting our mission and vision statements, as we shape the ways we will, together as the church, strive to make real in the world the mission of Jesus, we take this Gospel text as a guide and

model, for what Jesus describes here is nothing less than a statement of his own mission and vision as the long-awaited Messiah. As we move to our strategies, we should continually strive Jesus' mission "today".

We like Elijah, Elisha and Jesus strive to intentionally reach out others. To whom should I reach out? Look around in your family, friends, in your circle of life.

The year of the Lord' is now, the "today" is now, to go and evangelize. Jesus gave the Church a clear mission -love God and one another by making disciples. Make disciples of everyone, everywhere. The Church is charged with shaping disciples for Jesus.

Jesus made lost people his priority. He spent time with them, he talked to them, he understood their hearts, and he loved them by making an investment in them. Jesus found lost people than he made them disciples. To the lost, (we) Jesus reveals the message of the kingdom of heaven, which introduces them to the good news of a life that can be lived more successfully because of a real relationship with the living God. The Church exists in order to evangelize.

Arriving late and leaving early become our rule among the demanding religious consumers. We build up "get it over with" mentality. We (church) were never in the real business of reaching the lost. We are irrelevant to the lost. It's not their fault. Jesus never blamed the lost for being lost; he just wanted to find them. I challenge you insiders to reach out the outsiders, and invite them. We should be attractive and accessible to outsiders, being challenged as insiders to helping them to change and grow and move beyond consumerism.

In Christ,

Fr László



Read the Scripture and Gospel Readings