

PASTOR'S WEEKLY MESSAGE FOR THE 14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B

“They would not accept Him.”

In the first reading, God warns the prophet, Ezekiel, about what he will find among his own people. Ezekiel writes: “I heard the Lord speaking to me. He said, ‘Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to the rebels who have turned against me. Their sons are defiant and obstinate. See, whether they listen or not.’” *Rebels; defiant; obstinate*; these are words that speak of people who are stubborn; proud; not ready to listen or to obey God’s words to them. If they do not listen to God’s message, it is doubtful that they will receive Ezekiel very well. This is what often happened to God’s messengers, the prophets. And, it is also what happened to God’s special messenger—His son, Jesus. This is what we heard in the Gospel reading today: “He began teaching in the Synagogue, and most of them were astonished when they heard Him. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom and these miracles? This is the carpenter, surely, the Son of Mary. And they would not accept Him.’”

Is this not an attitude that we can meet all around us? People see somebody who speaks well, who does well, they simply can not accept this. They can not accept him/her. They question and sow doubts in the minds of others. They dig into the past of that person. *Oh, he comes from that part of the country! We can’t take this from him. Well, she is from that tribe, she can’t do this...impossible!* Is it not sad to see in the Gospel that the very people who should have accepted Jesus are the ones who rejected Him? The scribes and the Pharisees were those who had studied God’s message in the Old Testament. They had received the Law. They had been taught by the prophets. Yet, they are those who refused to welcome God’s own Son. Even, Jesus was surprised at this. We heard Him in the Gospel: “He was amazed at their lack of faith.”

To be amazed is to be greatly surprised. It is to be overcome by wonder. This is how Jesus feels when He sees how the Jewish leaders treat Him. No matter what He says in God’s Name, no matter the signs He gives them that He is sent by God, they do not accept Him. They oppose Him, they persecute Him. They will not rest until they have had Him killed. We have said that we can meet this attitude all around us... But is it not true that we can also meet this attitude within ourselves? You may think you have not rejected Jesus. You accept what He says. I do not oppose His teaching. Let me say this: *There is, within most of us, a Pharisee, a Pagan, a Sinner and a Saint.* If you think about this, you will see the truth in it.

There is this part of us which is not ready to accept certain people. We judge them. We do not like their ways, different from ours. We may even look down on them. If ever they tried to tell us something, it is sure that we would not listen, not to them! We are so proud, we do not want to need anyone, not even God. We like to think everything is fine with ourselves. This is the Pharisee in us. There is the other part in us which sometimes does not trust God and His ways for us. We think God is far away, or far above. We do not really believe He is concerned about us and loves us very much. We do not believe in the God who came to save us. We believe in our own God, a pagan God. This is the pagan in us. There is, of course, the part of us that is weak and sinful. We sometimes think bad thoughts, and we do evil actions. We do not do the good that we should be doing. And we do the evil that we should be avoiding. This is the sinner in all of us. And yes, there is the saint in you and in me. Perhaps you did not know the saint more than the pagan or the Pharisee in you, but the saint is there, too. It is the part of us which receives God’s Word and keeps it in our heart. It is the one who responds to the Holy Spirit and tries to faithfully follow Jesus.

God, in His love, can and will convert the pagan in us, and bring us to the true faith. God, in His mercy, can and will bring the sinner in us, back to Himself. But, the Pharisee in us, this is the problem...even with God. Our weaknesses, our doubts, our sins...they are not a problem to God. But, our pride and our *too great* self-assurance—what can He do with that? The Pharisee is the one who does not see his need for God. He thinks all is well with himself. Others are wrong. Others are not honest; not truthful but, believe they are *all they should be*. How can God do anything for such a person? This is what happened to Jesus in today’s Gospel. We are told: “He could work no miracle there.” Jesus could cure only a few people in that town, because people did not want to come to Him and accept their need of Him. To accept Him, they would have had to accept that they needed Him. They did not want that; they were too proud.

During the week, look into yourself, and meet your Pharisee, your pagan, your sinner, and your saint, too. Ask the Lord to convert the pagan, to draw the sinner to Himself, and to help the saint grow. And, tell Him that you need Him very much, and you no longer want to be a Pharisee.