

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year B: Ez 2:2-5; Ps 123; 2Cor 12:7-10; Mk 6:1-6
July 4, 2021
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Have you ever been nervous about having to say something to someone? Have you ever been nervous that what you have to say might not be well-received or accepted? Have you ever feared the possibility of being rejected or of making others upset by what you have to say? This was often the case for the prophets of the Old Testament. In the first reading, the Lord was preparing the prophet Ezekiel to preach a difficult message to the Chosen People. He said to Ezekiel, “*Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have revolted against me to this very day. Hard of face and obstinate of heart are they to whom I am sending you.*” Even though the Israelites were the Chosen People, they had often rebelled against God and broken their promise to be faithful to Him. And it was now up to Ezekiel to remind the Israelites that this was why God had allowed them to be taken into exile by the Babylonians. It was not pleasant news to deliver, and Ezekiel probably braced himself for possible rejection by the Israelites.

In the Gospel, Jesus also faced rejection, by those who were most familiar with Him. He was home in Nazareth, and He went to the synagogue to preach. The people who heard Him admitted the wisdom of His teaching, but then they took offense at Him, probably because they felt challenged by what He said. He was preaching to the Chosen People, who were waiting for the Messiah, and yet they were rejecting the very One for whom they were waiting. This probably did not surprise Jesus, but still, “*He was amazed at their lack of faith*” (Mk 6:6).

It’s probably true that in every age, the Gospel message has faced some opposition and rejection, at least somewhere. The Apostles certainly learned this, at the very beginning, when they set out to preach and were eventually put to death. St. Paul became quite accustomed to the opposition he faced. In the second reading today, he said, “*I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*”

The Church has always faced opposition from a world and a culture that does not follow its beliefs. But there is a new reality that the Church faces, and that is opposition from *within* the Church to the teachings of Christ. This is

something that we should all be honest about. The problem will not go away if we ignore it or deny it. It is well known that some of the Church's moral teachings, especially about human sexuality, are widely rejected even by those who count themselves as members of the Church. For this reason, there is always great pressure on those who preach the Gospel to avoid those topics that might be controversial. And then there's the related pressure to simplify or water-down the Gospel message to something that might be more acceptable to the audience, in order to avoid controversy. In fact, one of the reasons that some young men today decide not to become priests is fear of being rejected for preaching the Gospel. They know that if they get ordained, they will have a solemn obligation to preach the truths that Christ taught the world, and they fear that even people in the Church will not want to hear these truths and will be angry if they are preached.

This weekend we celebrate our nation's birthday. There are so many noble elements of our nation and our national culture that are completely consistent with the Gospel of Christ, such as our bedrock principle of religious liberty and our commitment to justice. But there are other, newer elements of our national culture that are directly contrary to our faith in Christ. And it can happen that members of the Church become influenced by these ideas and become more faithful to them than to the teachings of Christ. The challenge for all of us who try to share the faith of Christ is to help others recognize and admit when there is a contradiction between what Christ taught and what they might accept as true.

We in the Church want to help to bring out the best in our nation and help our nation to be faithful to what is true, beginning with truths of nature, such as the truth that marriage is the union of a man and a woman, by the design of God the Creator. No new legal theory can ever change fundamental truths, no matter how popular they may become at a given time. Our task as Christians is to remain rooted in the truths that Christ taught us, to be faithful to those truths, and to resist whatever is contrary to the teachings of Christ. And our unity in the Church and in our parish should be based on our common acceptance of the teachings of Christ. We will not be able to help our nation follow the truth, if we in the Church are not united in the truth.

So, we pray on this Independence Day that our nation will accept and follow what is true, both in nature and in Revelation, and we pray that we as a Church will always remain faithful to the teachings of Christ – however unpopular they may be – so that we can help to bring out the best in our country and help it follow the ways of truth and come to love and serve God the Creator and praise Our Lord Jesus Christ.