

Subject: 14 Sunday of Year B

14th Sunday Year B

(Four sermons)

WHAT RECEPTION WOULD WE GIVE JESUS?

Mk. 6:1-6

Most of us like to go home, especially when we have been away for a long time. We look forward to being hugged and greeted by family and friends. If that's how we feel it seems reasonable to assume that Jesus had a similar feeling when He returned to His home town of Nazareth. For nearly thirty years of His life, He had called that place home. There He went to school, learned the skill of carpentry and grew to manhood. It was then that His ministry called Him away. By our standards He did not go very far His native town, but if He travelled to the capital Jerusalem it meant undertaking a four-day journey on foot, walking twenty miles a day. He could not go back very often. Time and distance would not permit it.

Today's Gospel tells of His return to Nazareth. I should think He went with eager anticipation, but that visit proved to be one of the most disappointing experiences of His life. It was the Sabbath day and as was His custom He went to the synagogue and began to teach. The crowd were somewhat impressed with the things He had to say, but they could not get over the fact that He was once a local boy. To them He was just a carpenter, the Son of Mary. Because they know His beginnings, they would not accept Him. Jesus left them saying, "A prophet is only despised in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house." His hometown and His own people had dishonoured Him.

I wonder what kind of reception Jesus would have wanted. Do you suppose that we would have given Him a better reception? Surely, we would not dishonour Him and write Him off as a mere carpenter posing as a man of letters? From our vantage point in history, we can see Him as He really is, the Son of God and Saviour of the world. If He came to our town, we would celebrate the occasion. We would try to make sure that the whole town turned out to greet Him. We would show Him our Church where we love and worship Him. If our town had an art gallery, we would show Him the pictures painted about Himself. We would get the best choir to sing about Him and for Him. We would not make the same mistake as did the people of Nazareth.

We do really believe that this is the kind of honour that Jesus would want? Do we think that Jesus would want all this fuss? If we walked with Him in His public ministry, we would see that He did not like to be flattered. A man knelt before Him and said, "Good Master, what must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone."

All Jesus would want is our love. He would like to see how much we appreciated the Mass and how fervent and frequent is our reception of the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

He would be much more interested in our personal lives and the quality of our relationships. He would want to see couples married to each other and not living in sin. He would want to see homosexuals and lesbians respecting themselves and not being actively involved with each other. He would want to know how a father treats his children and how a husband and wife treat each other. He would be interested in the poor of the community and what, if anything, we are doing to make their lives more bearable. He would want to know our attitude to people of different races and how we treat them. If there was hospital in the

area, He would want to visit the sick and see what He could do for them. If there was a jail too, He would want to visit that and see what help they were being given to get their lives back on track.

Lord Jesus, You believed in some things so deeply that You were willing to die for them. Words of praise mean little or nothing to You. The only kind of honour You want is for us to hear Your message, take it to heart, and apply it to our lives.

HOW TO COPE WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

Mk. 6:1-6

Throughout life we have to cope with disappointments. Some are small like rain on the day you have planned a picnic, others are earth-shattering as when a policeman calls at your house to inform you that your husband has been killed at work through an industrial accident. How do we cope with such happenings?

The person who is unprepared to deal with disappointment is unprepared for life in the real world. Philosophies and religions have long addressed this. The ancient stoics thought the answer was apathy: train yourself to feel nothing, neither pain nor pleasure. Buddha taught his followers that life is essentially sorrowful and sorrows stem from the craving of pleasure, so the way to end sorrow was to rid yourself of desire. In this way the person who wants nothing will never be disappointed.

The approach of both the stoics and Buddha is negative. The stoics tell us to overcome disappointments by not feeling and Buddha by not wanting. There is some truth in each idea to help us cope with disappointments but surely there is a better way.

Today's Gospel reading contains another approach to the problem of disappointments. Having begun His public ministry, to which the response had been enthusiastic and at times almost overwhelming, Jesus decided to take His message of redemption and healing back home to Nazareth. What kind of response would He receive? His life-long neighbours and relatives listened to His teaching, and were duly impressed. But instead of responding to the message, they discounted the messenger. To them, He was nothing more than "the carpenter, the Son of Mary". Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith.

The one thing He wanted was a positive response to His cause. His consuming passion was for the Good News to be accepted, but the general consensus among the people of Nazareth was that they were not interested. They were curious about this native Son, whose fame had spread all over their land, but they wanted no part of His radical ideas. Their response was a great disappointment to Him. The way He responded to their attitude is a classic example of how to deal with disappointment.

Their attitude did not discourage Him. He called to mind a familiar proverb, "A prophet is only despised in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house." Jesus needed to say this in order to put His experience in perspective. It was a reminder that life had not singled Him out for unfair treatment. Rejection was the treatment handed out to the prophets who had gone before Him. Prophets speak unpopular truth and for doing this they paid dearly. Jesus took His experience at Nazareth, not as a personal affront, but as the expected way in which people had treated prophets. It was an indication that He stood in their proud company. That was His response to disappointment.

When disappointments come to us our first inclination is to raise the futile cry, "Why me, Lord?" That question is rarely a search for insight. More often, it is the registering of a complaint, and an expression of self-pity. That attitude is ineffective. It would be better to ask, "Why not me, Lord?" Disappointments are common to all of us. Dreams are shattered

and hearts are broken every day. On what grounds should you and I expect to be the exception?

The second step that Jesus took was to make the most of what was available. Mark says, "He could work no miracle there, though He cured a few sick people by laying His hands on them." Denied the opportunity to do a big thing, He did small things instead. Unable to help many, He helped the few. So much of His life was like that. He had to work in difficult circumstances and with difficult people. He never threw in the towel, nor even became discouraged. He did what He could and what He achieved was nothing short of incredible.

That is the way we must behave in the face of disappointment. When we have to settle for something less than our hopes, we can make the most of that something. It might be poor health. We wanted a robust body but we were given a weak one. We have to cope with a shortage of money. Each month we can barely pay the bills. We have a disappointing marriage. We thought it was going to be a successful one. How do we respond to disappointments such as these? As regards poor health and a shortage of money, we can at least thank God that we are better off than many others. If you cannot have a great marriage, perhaps you can make it a good marriage or at least a workable one. Much comfort, strength and pleasure can be derived from two decent people, living together and trying to make it work. It doesn't have to be the romance of the century. Take what is available and do with it what you can.

Jesus did that in Nazareth, not with a marriage, but with His ministry. He must have gone home with high hopes. Nothing would have pleased Him more than for His relatives and neighbours to commit themselves to His cause. But that didn't happen. His mission in Nazareth was mostly a failure, but it was not a total loss. After healing a few who were sick Mark tells us, "He then made a tour of the villages, teaching."

Like all people, Jesus knew the bitter pain of disappointment. But unlike many, He was not defeated by it. He took it in His stride. It did not discourage Him. He did what He could with it and then moved on to the next thing. That is how we must treat disappointments.

Lord Jesus, no experience in life need ever be a total loss. Disappointments are sure to come but by following Your example, we can make the most of them.

WHAT KIND OF HONOUR DOES JESUS WANT?

Mk. 6:1-6

For most of us, going home is one of life's most eagerly anticipated experiences, especially when we have been away for a long time. We find ourselves thinking of and longing for familiar sights, and sounds, and faces.

If you and I feel that way about the place of our roots, it seems reasonable to assume that Jesus had a similar feeling for the small town of Nazareth where He spent His early days. For nearly thirty years of His life, He called that place home. There He went to school, learned to work, and grew into manhood. Then His ministry called Him away.

Today's Gospel reading tells of the occasion He returned to Nazareth. He must have gone with an eager anticipation, but that visit proved to be one of the most disappointing

experiences of His life. On the Sabbath, He went to the synagogue and began to teach. The crowd was somewhat impressed with the things He said, but they could not get over the fact that He was a hometown boy. To them, He was only "the carpenter, the son of Mary"; so, they did not take His message very seriously. In fact, most of them were offended by it.

Jesus left there saying, "No prophet is without honour except in his native place, among his own kindred, and in his own house." In other words, He felt that He had been dishonoured in the place and by the people that He knew best. What kind of reception would have pleased Him? What kind of honour does Christ want? We think we would never make the same mistake as the people of Nazareth. We would never ridicule Jesus, or write Him off as a mere carpenter posing as a man of letters. This is because from our vantage point in history, we see Him as He really is, the Son of God, the Master Teacher, the Great Physician, and the Saviour of the world. If He came to our town, we would have a parade to celebrate the occasion. We would dine Him and the mayor would present Him with a key to the city. Everybody who was anybody would be there. We would give Him a tour of the town and show Him all of the churches and cathedrals that have been built in His honour. We would even take Him to an art gallery and show Him how He has inspired some of our greatest paintings. We would assemble a choir and sing Him some of the hymns written about Him. Our town would not make the same mistake as Nazareth.

But is this the kind of honour that Jesus wants? Do you think, for a moment, that we could flatter Him? All of this would be nothing more than a reflection of our own littleness. It is little people who want and need extravagant praise. It is little people who push their egos to the front and eagerly anticipate adoration and flattery. People who have depth of character and largeness of mind are never like that.

Leave the city of Nazareth, walk with Jesus through the remainder of His ministry, and you will see how little He cared for flattery. A man knelt in His presence one day and said, "Good Teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?" Jesus answered, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone." On another occasion, He challenged people with these words, "You call me 'Lord, Lord and never put into practice what I teach you?" Jesus watched the scribes and Pharisees as they decorated the graves of the prophets, whom their fathers had killed. He saw that both of those activities, as different as they seemed, were essentially the same. If a prophet is alive, you kill him. After he is dead, you worship him. Either way you avoid the moral message they proclaim.

The prophets of the Old Testament were not asking to be flattered nor worshipped. The one thing they wanted was that their message be heard and heeded. Jesus stands in the line of these great men; and He, even less than they, can be placated with flattery. The people of His hometown dishonoured Him and did not give Him the attention that was His due. We would never do that. But we could dishonour Him with words of praise and not take His message seriously and apply it to our lives.

He would care nothing for our compliments. He would be much more interested in our personal lives and the quality of our relationships. He would want to know how a father treats his children and how a husband treats his wife. He would be vitally interested in the poor and disabled of our community and what, if anything, we are doing to help them. He might ask us about the aged and what we are doing to make their lives more bearable. He would, no doubt, want to know about our attitude toward people of different races. He might even visit our prisons, and ask us what plans we have for helping those people to get their lives back on track.

Lord Jesus, You believed in some things so deeply that You were willing to die for them. Words of praise mean little or nothing to You. The only kind of honour You want is for us to hear Your message, take it to heart, and apply it to our lives.

THE FACTS DON'T REVEAL ALL

Mk. 6:1-6

After several months of travelling the country preaching, healing and performing miracles, Jesus decided to pay a visit to His home town of Nazareth. That visit proved to be very disappointing because instead of receiving a warm welcome, He was given the cold shoulder. As a result, He did not stay very long. After just one teaching session, and healing a few who were sick, He left.

We find it hard to believe that virtually an entire town could treat Jesus with such contempt. They must have been incredibly blind or foolish, or both. But are we any different from them? Mark did not tell this story to vilify the people of Nazareth. He told it for the benefit of his readers, to warn us that we can be just as blind to truth as those people were so long ago.

What an opportunity they missed. They listened to the greatest Teacher this world has ever known, but His message never penetrated their minds and hearts. They were amazed by His words, but having heard what He said, they then walked away and promptly proceeded to forget Him. We, too, have heard what Jesus taught. Like the people of Nazareth, we have been impressed with the power of His words, but we often fail to let His message bear fruit in our lives. We stand face to face with eternal truth and what good does it do us?

Mark does not tell us what Jesus taught, but judging from the response of the people, it was obviously something that made them feel uncomfortable. So, they changed the subject. They ignored the teaching and spent their time analysing the Teacher. By doing that they avoided facing up to the truth that Jesus was presenting to them.

Jesus had been treated like this before. People often tried to escape His truth by changing the subject. He confronted the woman of Samaria whose life was in tatters, but she wanted to talk about the geography of religion. 'Should we worship God on this mountain or on the one in Jerusalem?' He told a man to love his neighbour as himself, but he wanted to debate the meaning of the word, 'neighbour.'

We could criticise those ancient people for their evasive tactics, were it not for the fact that we do the same. Jesus taught us to live by faith, trusting God to supply all our needs. That sounds lovely. We are charmed by it, until bills have to be paid. Then we begin to analyse the Teacher. Of course, it was easy for Him to speak like that. He never had a family to support and mortgage payments to meet. He taught us to live in loving relationships with others, forgiving all their faults accepting them unconditionally. He was never married. He never had a demanding partner. He never had an interfering mother-in-law. He never had to deal with surly teenagers. When truth gets personal, we all have a tendency to look for loop holes that allow us to excuse ourselves.

The people of Nazareth not only missed what Jesus had to say, they also missed Jesus Himself by assuming they already knew Him. All they really knew were just a few facts about Him. They knew He was Mary's son and that He was a carpenter. They also knew the names of some of His relatives. Those few facts convinced them that they already knew everything that was worth knowing about Him. It was a sad mistake. Their little knowledge robbed them of a chance to know and love their Messiah.

That same thing happens to us in dealing with one another. We make assumptions about people from the bare facts we know about them. Facts are indeed true but they don't reveal the whole person. For example, you may fill in an application form for a job. You state your name, age, address, qualifications, marital status and experience, but this doesn't tell your employer who you really are. It doesn't tell him about your personal thoughts and feelings. He can't know that you wept into your pillow last night, concerned about your son's drug addiction or your daughter's marriage problems. Even if he knew all those things, he couldn't know the courage required for you to deal with them. We often miss the truth about people because we look no further than the bare facts about them.

If the people of Nazareth had taken the trouble to get to know Jesus, He could have enriched their lives. Are we like them? Do we take the trouble to know Jesus and really listen to His teaching? Sometimes we are so familiar with His words that we don't take them in. When we do hear His message, we are selective about what we accept and follow!

Lord Jesus, we must have the courage of people like Peter and the Apostles, who followed You and came to know You and Your message. May we welcome You into our lives and give You the opportunity of being our Friend and not a stranger,