

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Happy 4th of July!. I thank each and every one of you for being here today. I especially want to thank all our current Military members, our military Veterans and First Responders who help keep our country free and safe. Whether you were drafted or volunteered, you put your life on the line for all of us. And that's what I want to speak about, the hero's we just heard about in today's readings, Bible heroes that stood in the breach and saved us all. We have two who were "drafted," chosen by God, in Ezekiel and Paul. And then we have one, who freely joined us, and ended up paying the ultimate sacrifice. We see all three as intercessors, calling and defending God's people, to share God's truth to those around them. Two men like us, and then one who was Son of Man and Son of God. I remember as a kid watching Charlton Heston as Moses in the Ten Commandments parting the Red Sea and thought that would be cool to do. I also remember reading about Elijah for the first time, the story of calling down the fire upon the Altar in front of thousands of Baal worshippers after their priest had failed in calling their little "g" god. And then Elijah, almost saying "watch this" calling on our powerful Big "G" God and showing the world who is in control of all.

At least in my case, early on in my faith walk, I chose to remember the "highlight reels" and not really participate in the true calling of God's disciples. The honor and privilege of all baptized and confirmed Christians - to save souls.

All three of these readings demonstrate the reality of being a disciple for Christ and his Church. Three readings that you probably

wouldn't want to introduce and discuss with a new group of people who are just starting out on the faith walk. The Ezekiel reading is challenging but encouraging, you need to read the entire chapter to really understand the difficulties that were ahead for him. Sending him into a crowd of hard faced and obstinate of heart people, a rebellious house. God says later in the same chapter, "Do not fear, son of man, do not fear them or their words, do not fear even though there are briars or thorns and you sit among scorpions, you must speak my words." Ezekiel trusted and believed in God, and probably clinged on to God's words when God said "and they shall know a prophet has been among them." Again, chosen by God, drafted to do difficult work for God's kingdom.

Then Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, the infamous "A Thorn in my flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated." Again, tough verses when promoting our faith.

In this reading I always think of what sin Paul is constantly fighting, some spiritual temptation, or doubt in his role or just tired of doing this because of all his suffering. Theologians are all over the map, saying it was maybe sexual temptations, epilepsy, migraines, that he never fully recovered from his blindness, even Malaria which was prevalent back then.

But the lectionary's author makes an interesting point that I had never thought about, may be Paul is referring to an opponent or a bunch of opponents who are the "thorn," persistently abusing him not physically but by twisting his words to harm him and the mission God has sent him on. Some of those "thorns" were people he used to trust.

In both cases with Ezekiel and Paul's suffering, notice God did not take it away from them, but helped them to bear it. God's grace helped them through their

suffering and opposition. God did not spare them of their suffering but made them able to conquer all these hardships through His grace. Neither one of them gave in, never broke, and no amount of suffering or opposition made them quit. As in our reading, Paul wrote that it strengthened him, that through his weakness of being “beat up” all the time, the power of Christ was able to dwell in him and keep him strong. He was able to carry out his mission because he stayed in Christ! He fed on Christ!

In our Gospel reading, we have the story of Jesus coming home to Nazareth. In this story we don't have strangers but people who knew him for 30 years, who watched him go from a child to an adult. We find similar stories in Matthew (13: 54-58) and Luke (4: 16-30) both having Jesus visiting his hometown of Nazareth, all with similar results as our reading today.

But in Mark's reading, Jesus is accompanied by His disciples, again people “drafted”, chosen by Christ to be his messengers when His physical ministry on earth is over. This was a difficult day, but a necessary day. More training and formation. Jesus was constantly teaching and preparing his Disciples for when he would no longer be there physically, and this was one of the most difficult lessons for them all – The Lesson of rejection. Rejection of the worse kind, people who know you. People rejecting you because you love Jesus Christ. St Augustine wrote: men are hopeless creatures, and the less they concentrate on their own sins, the more interested they become in the sins of others. They seek to criticize, not to correct. Unable to excuse themselves, they are ready to accuse others.

The Gospel reading really made me think about how many times in my life, where I have acted like those same people who greeted Jesus in Nazareth that day. Close

minded and closed heart. How many opportunities has God “drafted” me, chosen me, to bring someone to Christ, to stand in the breach for that person and I blew it? How many times have I chosen to judge and not to invite? In those circumstances, the focus is definitely on me and not on the mission of loving God and loving of neighbor first.

I travelled to Orlando last week on business, I was gone for 5 days. I got to experience Post Covid travel for the first time. It was not fun or enjoyable. People have changed and not for the better. The “me” attitudes were everywhere, from the airport terminals, to the airplanes, to the hotel. And you don't have to get on an airplane to experience this, just get in your car and drive to Dallas. I've been commuting to Dallas for 30 years, (that's a whole different homily) and it was always bad during rush hour because so many cars and not enough pavement, but now, many of the people are just mean. They are angry. It's a rebellious house out there people, and we are called, drafted, chosen to be like Ezekiel and Paul to fix it. Not sit at home, not just come to Mass. But to be God's heroes. Stand in the breach.

All this anger and self-glorification are heart issues. Not physically, these are Spiritual heart issues. Eternal life issues.

Not performing miracles that day in Nazareth wasn't because Jesus became weaker, it was because the people lacked faith. Mark wrote in the last verse of our Gospel reading, “he (Jesus) was amazed, some interpretations say “marvel,” at their lack of faith.”

Literally the next verse, Mark writes that Jesus continue to teach in the vicinity, he summoned the 12 and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, and to only rely on God on their physical and spiritual needs.

None of our hero's we heard about today quit, they won by being all in, by believing and trusting in their Creator and who He called them to be. It is a time where we all need to come together and focus on the Cross, not ourselves, standing in the Breach for are faith, our Catholic faith, and our Brothers and Sisters. Loving Christ and seeking each other in Christ's love. Then we will witness miracles, and it will be more than just "curing a few sick people." END