

GOSPEL

MARK 6:1-6

Jesus went to his home town and his disciples accompanied him. With the coming of the sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, 'Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?' And they would not accept him. And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is only despised in his own country among his own relations and in his own house'; and he could work no miracle there, though he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today's Gospel passage (cf. Mk 6:1-6) narrates the story of when Jesus returns to Nazareth and begins to teach in the synagogue on a Saturday. Ever since he had left it and begun preaching in the nearby hamlets and villages, he had never again set foot in his country. He has returned. Therefore, the whole town must have been there to listen to this son of theirs, whose fame as a wise master and powerful healer had by now spread throughout Galilee and beyond. But what could have stood out as a success, turned into a resounding rejection, to such an extent that Jesus could not perform any mighty work but only a few healings. The dynamics of that day are reconstructed in detail by Mark, the Evangelist: At first the people of Nazareth listen [to him] and are astonished; then perplexed, they ask themselves "Where did this man get all this?", this wisdom? and in the end they take offence, recognizing him as the carpenter, Mary's son whom they had seen grow up. Thus Jesus sums it up with the expression which has become proverbial: "A prophet is not without honours, except in his own country".

We may ask ourselves: why do

Jesus' fellow townsmen go from astonishment to disbelief? They make a comparison between Jesus' humble origins and his current abilities: he is a carpenter; he did not study and yet he preaches better than the scribes and he performs miracles. And instead of opening up to the reality, they take offence. According to the people of Nazareth, God is too great to humble himself to speak through such a simple man! It is the scandal of the Incarnation: the unsettling event of a God made flesh who thinks with the mind of a man, works and acts with the hands of a man, loves with a human heart, a God who struggles, eats and sleeps like one of us. The Son of God overturns every human framework: it is not the disciples who washed the feet of the Lord, but it is the Lord who washed the feet of the disciples (cf. Jn 13:1-20). This is a reason for scandal and incredulity, not only in that period, but in all ages, even today.

The radical change Jesus brought about commits his disciples of both yesterday and today to a personal and community [self] examination. Indeed, even in our day it can happen that we harbour some prejudices that prevent us from seeing reality. But, today, the Lord asks us to adopt an attitude of humble listening and docile expectation because God's grace often manifests itself in surprising ways that do not match our expectations. Together, let us think about Mother Teresa of Calcutta, for example. A tiny sister — no one took her very seriously — who went around the streets to gather up the dying so that they could have a dignified death. With prayer and her work, this tiny sister performed wonders! A small woman revolutionized charity work in the Church. She sets an example for our times. God does not conform to human prejudices. We must make an effort to open our heart and mind to welcome the divine reality which comes to encounter us. It is a case of having faith: lack of faith is an obstacle to God's grace. Many people who have been baptized live as though Christ did not exist. They repeat the gestures and the signs of faith but these do not correspond to a true bond with

Jesus' person and his Gospel. Each Christian — all of us, each of us — is called to deepen this fundamental belonging, and try to bear witness to it with a consistent conduct in life, always motivated by charity.

Through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, let us ask the Lord to melt the hardness of hearts and the narrowness of minds so that we can be open to his grace, to his truth and to his mission of goodness and mercy which is addressed to all, with no exception.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What stood out to you from the Gospel or Pope Francis' reflection? Why?
- Why do you think the leaders in the synagogue had such a tough time believing in Jesus?
- Pope Francis refers to the "scandal of the Incarnation: the unsettling event of a God made flesh". What does Jesus being both fully God and fully man teach us?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.