

GOSPEL

LUKE 4:21-30

Jesus began to speak in the synagogue, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.' And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips.

They said, 'This is Joseph's son surely?' But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself" and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own countryside."' And he went on, 'I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country.'

'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to the widow at Zarephath, a Sidonian town. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of these was cured, except the Syrian, Naaman.'

When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him down the cliff, but he slipped through the crowd and walked away.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today's Gospel account once again, like last Sunday, brings us to the synagogue of Nazareth, the village in Galilee where Jesus was brought up in a family and was known by everyone. He, who left not long before to begin his public life, now returns and for the first time presents himself to the community, gathered in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

This passage of Luke the Evangelist is not simply the account of an argument between compatriots, as sometimes happens even in our neighbourhoods, arising from envy and jealousy, but it highlights a temptation to which a

religious person is always exposed — all of us are exposed — and from which it is important to keep a distance. What is this temptation? It is the temptation to consider religion as a human investment and, consequently, "negotiate" with God, seeking one's own interest.

Instead, true religion entails accepting the revelation of a God who is Father and who cares for each of his creatures, even the smallest and most insignificant in the eyes of man. Jesus' prophetic ministry consists precisely in this: in declaring that no human condition can constitute a reason for exclusion — no human condition can constitute a reason for exclusion! — from the Father's heart, and that the only privilege in the eyes of God is that of not having privileges, of not having godparents, of being abandoned in his hands.

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). The 'today', proclaimed by Christ that day, applies to every age; it echoes for us too, reminding us of the relevance and necessity of the salvation Jesus brought to humanity. God comes to meet the men and women of all times and places, in their real life situations. He also comes to meet us. It is always he who takes the first step: he comes to visit us with his mercy, to lift us up from the dust of our sins; he comes to extend a hand to us in order to enable us to return from the abyss into which our pride made us fall, and he invites us to receive the comforting truth of the Gospel and to walk on the paths of good. He always comes to find us, to look for us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- The crowd of people listening to Jesus quickly turned from admiration to rage. Have you ever experienced people turning on you because you spoke the truth? What happened?
- Has something Jesus said caused difficulties for you in your faith or life? What was it?
- Our family and friends are often the most difficult to speak to about our Catholic faith. Have you ever spoken to a non-Catholic about your faith? What happened?

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.