

Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time: Power Made Perfect In Weakness

In today's second reading, from St. Paul's *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, we heard that he was fighting what he called a thorn in the flesh. Three times he begged the Lord to remove this from Him. But all he heard was the Lord saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." What was it that was upsetting St. Paul so much? People have speculated over the years, but we have no way of knowing exactly what it was. Whatever it was, it was significant for Paul. It could not have been something as minor as a speech impediment. It was something far more personal and more severe. Whatever it was, it probably kept him awake at night. It is troubling for us to think that the great St. Paul had a major personal problem. Even in our cynical age, we still want to turn our saints into perfect little plastic statues. But people are not perfect, and even the greatest of the saints were people like you and me, continually fitting the temptation to sin.

The voice of the Lord told Paul that His Power, the Lord's Power, is made perfect in weakness. It was clear to Paul, that whatever success he had proclaiming the Gospel only occurred because God was working through him. He went on to write in *Philippians 4:13*, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"

Paul was certainly not a spiritual introvert. He did not just focus on himself and ignore all who are around him for the sake of his spiritual life. Actually, no follower of Jesus Christ can be self-centered. We are not Buddhists. We are not Scientologists. We are Catholics. We are Christians. The Gospel of Jesus Christ must be listened to and must be proclaimed.

We all have a tendency to be so bogged down with our own conception of what the minister of the Lord should be like that we miss the Word of God. We hear the priest and deacon preach about the scriptures, but we cannot get past his humanity. We say, "This priest who talks about being kind and charitable, does not appear to me to be very kind." We learn about priests who have been removed from ministry for committing serious offenses, including sins against children and the vulnerable, and we want to erase from our minds any truth that they may have proclaimed. But truth is truth, whether it is proclaimed by a saint or a sinner.

In the first reading Ezekiel is told that the people would not want to hear the Word of God which the Lord told him to proclaim. People would have misgivings about him. He was strange. He was unconventional. He shocked people with many of his prophetic actions. They laughed at him. They derided him. But that did not lessen the fact that he proclaimed the Word of God. His words were true. Instead of looking at the man speaking, they should have listened to the man speaking.

The same thing happened to Jesus as related in today's Gospel. Jesus was in Nazareth, the place where he grew up. The people who heard him preach were his neighbors. They knew him since he was small. They remember when he was a little boy learning a bit at a time how to become a carpenter like his foster father, Joseph.

They remember him playing with their children. They remember when he went through growth spurts. They remember when his voice changed and when he began to grow a beard. They were so bogged down in their knowledge of Jesus' humanity, that they refused to listen to the Word of God that He was proclaiming,.....and that He was. They could not believe that God would work through Jesus. Their lack of faith resulted in Jesus not being able to perform any of the mighty deeds of God among them.

We often make the same mistake. Some people seem too ordinary to us to be vehicles of God's truth. They may be our parents or our children, our neighbors or our companions at work or school. They might proclaim a reality that could change our lives, but we do not want to hear it from them. "Who does he think he is? Who does she think she is?," we complain. It is easy for us to be so mired in the humanity of the proclaimer that we refuse to listen to the proclamation.

Even worse, we might be so overwhelmed with our own sinfulness that we refrain from proclaiming the Lord. Some adults' view themselves is such a negative way that they feel unworthy to lead their children in faith and morals. "Who am I to tell my child not to do this or that, when I know that I often do things far worse." I fear that there are some people who leave their children off for faith formation, but do not join their spouse and attend the parent/children sessions not because they are too busy, nor because they do not want to be bothered, but because they do not feel that they are good enough to speak about God to their children. And the Word of God is not proclaimed. And children think that they have implicit approval from their parents to do things their family refuses to discuss.

Paul was told that Christ's power is made perfect in his weakness. Paul realized that it was God working through him that brought so many people to the faith. Christ's power also works through us. We really do not have the right to deny our responsibility to the Lord. We may think that we are not good enough to talk about the Lord, but we are good enough. He makes us good enough. We have to remember that the positive effects of what we say come from the Lord, not from us.

So we come before the Lord today and say with St. Peter, St. Paul and so many of the saints, "I am sinful, I cannot do your work" and Jesus says, "Yes you can. My power will work through you in ways greater than you can ever realize. My power is made perfect in your weakness."