

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTONARY # 101

READING I Ezekiel 2:2-5

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

As the LORD spoke to me, the spirit entered into me and set me on my feet,

and I heard the one who was speaking say to me: Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites,

rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have revolted against me to this very day.

Hard of face and obstinate of heart are they to whom I am sending you.

But you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD; And whether they heed or resist—for they are a rebellious house—

they shall know that a prophet has been among them.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 123:1-2, 3-4 (2cd)

R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.

To you I lift up my eyes
who are enthroned in heaven—
as the eyes of servants
are on the hands of their masters.
As the eyes of a maid
are on the hands of her mistress,
so are our eyes on the LORD, our God,
till he have pity on us.

Have pity on us, O LORD, have pity on us,
for we are more than sated with
contempt;
our souls are more than sated
with the mockery of the arrogant,
with the contempt of the proud.

Ezekiel = ee-ZEE-kee-uhl

This is a commissioning story. Look for three parts: God sending, authoritative instruction, and a description of the response.

The prophet's ministry is daunting. However, don't let your tone become too gloomy; God's word strengthens Ezekiel.

For meditation and context:

READING I

Are prophets born or made? While some prophets like Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) are called from the womb, others are pressed into the role. Whether born or made, the prophet's mission is daunting. Ezekiel (597-571 BC), the third of the major prophets, was a priest in Babylonian exile who was pressed to serve as God's prophet.

Writing in the first person ("I"), Ezekiel begins by describing a heavenly vision (1:1-28) that leads to his prophetic commission in today's reading. Once the vision's

enthroned figure speaks, Ezekiel is invaded by the spirit (*ruah* in Hebrew, wind, spirit), which sets him on his feet and empowers him to hear the divine voice. Identified as "Son of man" (an epithet for a human person and used frequently to identify Ezekiel), the priest, now become prophet, hears a summary of his mission. He is to inform the Israelites that God has spoken—"Thus says the Lord God!" For their part, the Israelites have rebellion in their blood that is both external ("hard of face") and internal ("obstinate of heart"). In the face of their rebellion against God, the formulaic "Thus

READING II

says the Lord God" is but the first of many instances where God's message is communicated to them in greater detail. Whether God's message through the priest/prophet is heeded or not, the rebellious Israelites will know that God's prophet and God's Word are present.

One of Paul's most persistent challenges with the early Christian communities was his need to defend his authority. As today's reading demonstrates, Paul employed sophisticated

READING II 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:
 That I, Paul, might not become too elated,
 because of the abundance of the revelations,
 a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan,
 to beat me, to keep me from being too elated.
 Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me,
 but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,
 for power is made perfect in weakness."
 I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses,
 in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me.
 Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults,
 hardships, persecutions and constraints,
 for the sake of Christ;
 for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Corinthians = kohr-in-thee-uhnz

Paul acknowledges the gift of his faith.

Paul is not complacent. He does not seek out the "thorn" but acknowledges what the suffering accomplishes.

Deliver the paradox looking directly at the assembly.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

GOSPEL Mark 6:1-6

Jesus departed from there and came to his native place,
 accompanied by his disciples.
 When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue,
 and many who heard him were astonished.
 They said, "Where did this man get all this?
 What kind of wisdom has been given him?
 What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands?
 Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary,
 and the brother of James and Joses and Simon?
 And are not his sisters here with us?"
 And they took offense at him.

Jesus comes as a teacher. They hear, yet they don't (want to) believe. Let the dissonance of the situation come through.

Naming his relatives gives the decriers assurance they have identified the right person. Read with a dismissive tone. Joses = JOH-seez or JOH-sez

Paul to state that he will "boast most gladly of my weaknesses," he actually places the entire focus on the Lord, who is the true authority and who has extended authority to Paul through vision, thorn, and grace.

The earliest of the Gospels, Mark's lean account tries to answer the question: Who is Jesus? To answer the question, the first half of Mark records many of Jesus' teachings and actions: healing the blind, deaf, lame; expelling demons; and even raising the

GOSPEL

opened, and truth demands that he boast only of the giver: the Lord. And lest he rely on having been the recipient of such visions ("being too elated"), God gives him a thorn in the flesh to torment him.

While much speculation surrounds the "thorn" (lust, physical or emotional illness, or even human or demonic opponents), no sure answer is possible. Even more, such speculation obscures Christ's remarkable response: "My grace is sufficient for you." The statement brings the entire account back to boasting and the fact that there is no room for it. While the statement leads

the rhetorical techniques to convince his Corinthian audience of his authority.

Drawn from the midst of such arguments (2 Corinthians 10—13), chapter 12 begins with Paul's account of his "visions and revelations of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 12:1) and leads to his remarks in today's readings about the "thorn" in his flesh. While all of this is placed in the context of his boasting, Paul cleverly pulls back, giving all of the honor to God's choice (and authority) rather than to himself. Thus, the visions and revelations are not from Paul, nor does he even understand what hap-

Jesus said to them,
"A prophet is not without honor except in his native place
and among his own kin and in his own house."
So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there,
apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands
on them.
He was amazed at their lack of faith.

It wasn't that Jesus had no power; it was
that he found no faith.

Read with disappointment.

dead. All of it leads to questions about his
identity.

Today's Gospel reading emphasizes
the fact that those who know Jesus expect
nothing extraordinary from him. He is a
tradesman, the son of tradesmen. His family
members are ordinary and known. Earlier
in Mark, Jesus' teaching and actions were
deemed threatening to the social order and
inappropriate to his status (Mark 3:6). His
family determined that he was mentally
unstable (Mark 3:21). In today's account,
cognitive dissonance reigns! The towns-
people know how ordinary Jesus and his

family are. Still, the marvels they hear of
him lead them to ask disparaging questions
and to conclude that he is offensive. Unable
to move past their preconceived notions
(*Who does he think he is?*), they refuse to
believe in him or accept him.

There are two points worth noting.
First, Jesus' words and actions (and the
example he cites), along with Nazareth's
reaction, align him with other Jewish
prophets. Unwilling to entertain the proph-
ets' challenging messages, the people neu-
tralized the message by attacking or
devaluing the person of the prophet. Jesus
will be no different. Second, even if Jesus'
family and fellow citizens refuse to believe
in him and accept him, there is an emerg-
ing group that does: his disciples and those
whose lives he has touched. Jesus already
identified them as his true family (Mark
3:33-35). Soon he sends them out on mis-
sion. S.L.