

## FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – B

READING I Ez 2:2-5

READING II 2 Cor 12:7b-10

GOSPEL Mk 6:1-6

In 593 B.C. Ezekiel was overwhelmed by God's appearance in an unclean land: Outside of Israel. God's dynamic presence (spirit) came over him. He learned the scope of his prophetic office. He was to preach to the first group of exiles (those from the deportation of 597 B.C.). As a priest, he was all too aware of Israel's history of rebellion. If Moses could call his people stiff-necked, God had every right to describe Ezekiel's audience as hard of face and obstinate of heart. As the first part of his mission showed, he did not have a willing audience. Elsewhere God had told him that if the house of Israel would not listen to its covenant partner, how much less, then, would they listen to a relatively unknown priest-prophet! Nevertheless, the people did have the right to hear God's Word and a chance to opt for God's plan. Even if they refused that Word and plan, they could not deny, and would have to conclude, that a prophet was in their midst.

The effect of this experience is beautifully described in Ez 3:15: "Thus I came to the exiles who lived at Tel-Abib by the river Chebar, and for seven days I sat among them distraught." Ezekiel's pantomiming and symbolic acts — hardly the best credentials — would show that this distraught human was God's spokesperson.

In this part of Second Corinthians, Paul seizes the opportunity to speak of his very personal experience of God. The impact of which never left him. He boasts of that experience because it demonstrates God's power. To keep him from becoming conceited, God subjected him to "an angel of Satan," either a grave illness (Lk 13:16) or, more probably, persecution at the hands of his own people (Ez 28:24). In these straits (2 Cor 6:4-7; 11:23-29) Paul besought God to remove the affliction. God's answer was not the removal of the problem, but the promise of continual support. This answer sparked Paul's theology of weakness/strength. The weaker the person, the greater the manifestation of God's power. Without dismissing his own apostolic efforts, Paul flaunts his weakness, realizing that God's power will be at work in him (1 Cor 1:27; Phil 4:13).

In the gospel selection, Mark offers a startling contrast. In 4:35-5:43 he demonstrated Jesus' power and his acceptance. Now the opposite is true. The people from his hometown have rejected him. (Mark is probably foreshadowing Jesus' final rejection.) According to Jesus' audience, there was a glaring disproportion between his human credentials (they knew his family) and the recent fame arising from his teaching and miracles. Consequently, they question the origin and nature of such gifts. Jesus' reaction is one of astonishment since faith seemed to be the obvious response. It is only too fitting to have Jesus quote the proverb that a prophet is accepted everywhere except at home.

For Mark's audience this episode helps to explain that while the Gentiles were accepting the Good News, Israel rejected it. Israel was anticipating another type of Messiah, and Jesus did not meet this expectation. Given Israel's history, the treatment of Jesus was not surprising. The Old Testament prophets often experienced such rejection. The basic issue, therefore, was the difficulty of accepting the word of a spokesperson without credentials as the Word of God.

To announce human weakness is to proclaim divine power. We feel we lack the proper credentials and conclude that we cannot speak for God. We acknowledge our failings and maintain that we cannot reflect our God. We admit our weaknesses and reason that we cannot proclaim our God. We therefore fail to realize that God uses human weakness to communicate his divine power. To announce human weakness is to proclaim divine power.

Paul experienced discouragement and failure in his ministry. Many of his fellow Jews rejected him. Not a few of his converts repudiated him. Paul did not seem to have the proper credentials. Paul's response was to note that his weaknesses, far from impairing the Good News, enhanced it. Such weaknesses pointed to the power of God. To acknowledge them meant to be totally open to a God who communicated power by using seemingly weak instruments. Paul summed it up: "When I am powerless, it is then that I am strong." To announce human weakness is to proclaim divine power.

Jesus experienced discouragement and failure in his ministry. Even the people from his hometown rejected him. He did not match their notion of Messiah. He lacked the proper credentials. In Mark, it is this "weak" Jesus who acknowledges his failures but who also gains strength by clinging to his Father. By coping with discouragement and failure, Jesus pointed to the power of his Father, a Father who articulated divinity in the weak humanity of his Son. For Mark, the cross is the symbol that weakness points beyond itself, viz., to the power of the resurrection. To announce human weakness is to proclaim divine power.

Husbands and wives who admit their failings and use them as a springboard for ongoing mutual love publicly proclaim the power of God. The discouraged who look beyond their own efforts to discover God at work announce the strength of God. Leaders, both civil and ecclesiastical, who acknowledge their failures and search out God's paradoxical ways proclaim the might of God. The sick and the dying who endure with their condition despite setbacks articulate the omnipotence of God. All such people see themselves as necessary sharers in God's power by reason of their weaknesses. To announce human weakness is to proclaim divine power.

Eucharist recites the weakness of Jesus as it culminates in death. Eucharist proclaims the power of God as it culminates in resurrection. Eucharist urges the believing community to cope with weakness by making it the vehicle of God's strength. Eucharist attests that to announce human weakness is to proclaim divine power.