



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Homily

[*Ezekiel 2:3-5; Psalm 123; 2Corinthians 12:7-10; Mark 6:1-6*]

Over the past week or so, everyone has been focused on the extreme heat. In what are rather unusual circumstances, we have observed the thermometer rise to levels we rarely see. At times it has been dangerously hot, so people have looked for ways to beat the heat – kids run through water sprinklers, adults look for air conditioning, everyone tries to stay hydrated – and perhaps also pray that the Archbishop will give a brief homily.

When we turn to the Gospel text for this mass, we see the temperature rising sharply in another sense – interiorly – as people listen to the preaching of Jesus. He has returned to his hometown and is preaching in the synagogue. As his fellow townspeople listen, they grow rather hot under the collar, if you will. That temperature rise we call anger leads to a very heated reaction to what they are hearing.

Notice, too, how they try to beat the heat. They automatically assumed that the source of their internal combustion was Jesus. So, in order to reduce the temperature, they sought to extinguish the heat source itself by discrediting him. In effect, what they said to one another was: “Who does this guy think he is? We know him! We saw him grow up! Who is he, to be claiming to have such wisdom?” They are trying to rob Jesus of any and all credibility so as to excuse themselves from having to pay serious attention to his teaching.

This event in the life of our Lord challenges us to look carefully at how we respond to his Word when it encounters us. What Jesus speaks is light and truth, which exposes to our view where we have turned away from God and therefore need to change our lives, to repent. How do we respond? Does the internal thermometer skyrocket in outrage, causing our blood to boil? In the affront felt by the townspeople as Jesus spoke to them, we can hear a call to do our own temperature check and gauge honestly our reaction to God’s Word spoken in Jesus Christ.

Similarly, their attempt to beat the heat by extinguishing its source summons us to ask ourselves if we do the same. Do we feel tempted to discredit the Lord Jesus by acting as if he were not God? Do we treat the Bible as no more than a piece of literature, subject to the judgement of our own “enlightened” thinking? Do we dismiss the Church as no more than a human institution led by sinful leaders? These are among the ways we repeat the reaction of the Nazareth townspeople, and for the same reason: locating the heat source outside of ourselves and thus striving to reduce the temperature by snuffing it out.

From the witness of Saint Paul, we learn the right way to lower the temperature, cool down, welcome the Word of God and experience the inner refreshment the Lord wills for each of us. He teaches us that we beat the heat by humility. Christian tradition is clear that the source of the inner heat generated

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by negative reaction to God's Word is pride. The effect on the body of the sun's scorching heat is little compared to the searing of the soul caused by egotism. Pride claims to be a firewall against God's dangerous commands, when in fact it shields us from the cool breeze of divine truth and makes us wither within. In the passage from *2Corinthians*, we hear the Apostle boast of his weakness. No trace of pride in what he is saying! He recognizes his total dependence upon the love of God, revealed in Christ, and is thus fully and peacefully receptive to God's every Word. Paul's inner thermometer could rise sharply in anger, we know, but it was always in response to any attempt to falsify, or discredit, the Word of God, and never in reaction against it.

As we heard from the prophet Ezekiel, stubborn resistance to the Word of God is a problem that has long bedevilled humanity. It is not only contemporary but also, sadly, perennial. This means we need constantly to face this honestly and carefully as we seek to grow in our relationship with the Lord. So, as we now turn to the Eucharist and prepare to receive the Lord in Holy Communion, let us pray for the grace to welcome the Word Jesus speaks to us. It will surely challenge us, yet we know that his alone are the words we need to hear and receive, since they are the only ones that lead to everlasting life (*John* 6:68).

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