

Homily 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B 8th July 2018

In today's first reading we hear that God commissioned Ezekiel to be a prophet to the Israelites at the time of the Babylonian exile. While being held captive in Babylon the Israelites had rejected God and embraced the Babylonian gods. But Ezekiel was just another Israelite captive, a slave. Regardless of Ezekiel's low status God says to him that it does matter whether Israelites listen to him or not they will know there is a prophet amongst them. God sent a lowly slave to free His people from slavery.

In the second reading Paul talks of the "thorn in his side" which stops him from getting too proud. Paul pleads with God to remove this thorn. To Paul's pleading God responds; "My grace is enough for you; my power is best in weakness." Paul, the Apostle to the gentiles, the Apostle who was charged with spreading the Gospel to the world, is a very flawed human being.

When Jesus returns to his own town, despite His learned teaching in the temple and the miracles He worked, Jesus is dismissed as a mere carpenter a son of

Mary. The contrast between Jesus in last week's Gospel and today's reading could not be any starker. In last week's Gospel the people's faith in Jesus allows Jesus to heal the woman suffering from a haemorrhage simply by touching His cloak. Jairus' faith in Jesus allows Jesus to raise Jairus' daughter from the dead. Jesus in fact says; "Your faith has saved you". In this week's reading Jesus is rejected as a mere carpenter a son of Mary. And, Mark comments; "He (Jesus) could work no miracle there". It would appear the people of Nazareth had no faith in Jesus. How could they, they only saw Him as a carpenter! How can a carpenter be the long awaited Messiah?

Last week's bulletin contained an article by Ruth Miranda titled "I'm just a". In the article Ruth relates how we often label ourselves "I'm just a nurse", "I'm just a mum"; we label ourselves as ordinary. But, what we fail to realise is that God works in the ordinary. God spreads his message through ordinary people like Ezekiel the slave, or the very flawed Apostle Paul, or Jesus the carpenter. The challenge for me is to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, to listen for God's message in the ordinary things of life. However I find this difficult in a society obsessed with status. How

much theology could I possibly learn in the ward of a hospital?

As I ponder our obsession with status and ranking I am reminded of a tale from the Zen Buddhist tradition. At the essence of this practice is a complete focus on the here and now. There was this ancient Zen master Dogen, who rejected the trappings of a Zen master, the ornate purple robes etc. Dogen preferred the simple dress of a peasant and preferred to sit meditating in the village streets rather than the serenity of the monastery. Anyway Dogen was invited to teach at a monastery in a distant village. The local feudal lord hearing the Zen Master Dogen was at the local monastery issued an invitation for Dogen to visit him. During the day of his visit Dogen was wandering the village dressed as a peasant. He sat under a large tree outside the lord's house meditating. The lord came out: Go away he said I am expecting a visit from the Zen Master Dogen I can't have you sitting here. Later in the day Dogen arrived at the lord's house dressed in the purple robes of a Zen Master. Dogen was welcomed with due respect and led to a room, where much to everyone's surprise he took off his robes folded them carefully and walked out. What's the

matter the lord cried? To which Dogen replied: Earlier in the day I, Dogen a Zen Master, sat outside your house dressed as peasant and you sent me away, now I have arrived dressed in the robes of a Zen Master and I am welcomed. Clearly my lord it is the robes you want so I have left them for you, good evening.

As I ponder the tale of Dogen, I wonder: Would Ezekiel have been a more effective prophet if he had not been a slave? Would Paul have been a better Apostle to the gentiles, if he had not been a very flawed human being? Would Jesus' ministry have been better served if he had been a High Priest instead of a lowly carpenter? The answer to my ponderings is clearly no. Why? The answer is simple because throughout history God has always chosen the right messengers. God's messengers are always not the person I expect, they are always counter cultural. God's message is always spoken by the weak not the powerful. As Paul reminds us; "my power is best in weakness."

Pope Francis has often said *"I prefer a Church that is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own*

security.” The message of Jesus is not found in lofty Cathedrals but is found on the streets. Because it is only on the streets I meet people. It is only on the streets where I can try to understand why a father murders his children then takes his own life in some act of hideous domestic violence. It’s only on the streets I will hear the cries of God’s people. Bishop Vincent said *“I am committed to the renewal of the church patterned on the paschal rhythm of Christ: the church that dies to worldly power, privilege, clericalism and rises to humility, simplicity, equality and servanthood; the church that might be smaller, poorer and humbler but hopefully more of a light and a sacrament of God’s love to the world.”* If I am to embrace this message of humility I must listen for God’s message in the unexpected places. I must as hard as it is listen to everybody with the ear of my heart. If I doubt the truth of this message all I need to do is imagine a Church where Cardinals listen to Alter Servers. Why is this so important? Because when Cardinals listen to Alter Servers; Alter Servers might just listen to Cardinals.