

July 5, 2014 And They Took Offense Homily

“And they took offense at him” (Mk.6:3). Even today, two thousand years later, the words recorded in Mark's gospel are upsetting, if not shocking. Today, Christ is often ignored, but his Church is often subjected to unrelenting criticism. "And he was amazed at their lack of faith" (Mk.6:6). One of the chief antagonists of the Catholic Church in the second century was a pagan philosopher known as Celsus. We learn of his numerous criticisms of the Church through the writings of an exemplary theologian of the early church, Origen. What Celsus found especially odious was the absurdity of a working man, a carpenter by trade, claiming to be divine and founding a religion whose adherents were steadily increasing. The one the church acknowledges as the Lord came out of a workshop, and not a Rabbinic school or a palace. For critics such as Celsus, Jesus is too common, too ordinary.

In today's gospel reading (Mk.6:1-6). Jesus returns to the place where he spent his youth. In view of the tragic episode about to unfold, we are reminded of the anguished words of the fourth evangelist: “He came to his own home and his people received him not” (Jn.1:11). In Jesus, God has made himself all too familiar... he has come so close to the Nazarenes, for their own comfort. “And they took offense at him” (Mk.6:3). And because he was so much a part of the fabric of their daily life for many years, they rejected him. “Familiarity breeds contempt”, wrote Shakespeare centuries after the gospels were written. Jesus is wounded and surprised by their rejection. So is it any wonder that for the rest of Mark's gospel, Jesus never enters a synagogue again.

A few reflections:

First, let us consider his Blessed mother. Recall the words of the aged prophet Simeon addressed to Mary on the day of Our Lord's Presentation in the Temple: “Behold, this child is destined for the rise and fall of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword shall pierce) so that the thoughts of many shall be revealed.” (Lk.2:34-35). The rejection of Jesus by her own kin must have pierced her heart and undoubtedly left her disconsolate, and in great pain.

Adrienne Von Speyr, a Swiss mystic and medical doctor, has a lovely reflection on the closing words of today's gospel: “They marveled at their unbelief” (Mk.6:6). “For everyone with a lively faith it is always a painful experience when the faith that fills his life and means everything to him is rejected by others. Every believer has this painful experience together with the Lord. There, in his hometown, Our Lord experienced this to the highest degree”.

When those dear to us reject the faith or treat it with studied indifference, it can be painful. At the wedding reception of my niece last night, I was seated next to my cousin, who, years ago renounced the Catholic faith and is now a Buddhist. Far too many today take offense at the Church and her teachings. The pain of rejection touches our lives as well. Finally, consider this frightening scenario: someday in the not too distant future, our neighbors may take offense at us because of our Christian beliefs. We need only consider

the mass slaughter of Christians in other parts of the world. In the future, martyrdom may be the only option for one professing his or her faith in Jesus. Lord, keep our faith strong!

Amen!