

January 31, 2016 Rejected at Home Homily:

Brothers and sisters, some of you may recall a masterful film "*Jesus of Nazareth*" directed by one of the great filmmakers of the last century Franco Zeffirelli. Appearing in the film were many of the world's most recognizable and acclaimed actors. Clearly one of the most emotionally charged scenes in the movie is a dramatization of today's gospel reading (Lk. 4:21-30).

Our Lord returns to the village of his youth and enters the synagogue, the place where Jews gather on the Sabbath to hear the word of God proclaimed. Upon taking the sacred scroll from the rabbi, Jesus reads a passage from the book of the prophet Isaiah, Chapter 61. The reading begins, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," Once he finishes the reading Jesus says, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing"! (Lk. 4:21)

Those assembled in the synagogue are at first stunned and then outraged. One irate Jew protested. "What do you mean?" Another shouted: "How can he dare to say such a thing?" And lastly, an offended congregant demanded an explanation: "The prophecy you read can only be fulfilled by the coming of the Messiah, the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven". Jesus replied: "The Kingdom of God comes in a way unforeseen by men. Repent and believe the Good News. The kingdom of Heaven, behold, is suddenly upon you".

The reaction was swift and acrimonious. "He is a blasphemer." "Rabbi, take the scriptures away from him. He shouldn't touch them with his unclean hands." Showing no concern for their strident opposition to his words, Jesus turned to the rabbi and said, "The prophet is never accepted in his own country". And then his parting words: "Blessed is he who is not ashamed of me". For the members of the congregation, that sealed Jesus' fate. "Never come back to Nazareth", they cried. And he never returned!

As Pope Benedict reminds us, "Jesus came to bear witness to the truth. He put himself in the service of the truth". He was unconcerned about public opinion. He was on a mission, and the harsh views of his people did not deter him from completing it. It is painful to realize that Our Lord experienced the rejection of friend and neighbor. We recall the words in the first chapter of John's gospel: "He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him". (Jn. 1:11)

What lessons may we derive from today's gospel? First, hostility and rejection are the fate the world has in store for those who, like Christ, have the mission of proclaiming the truth. Just make an attempt to defend some of the more unpopular moral teachings of the Church, and you'll have some notion of what Christ experienced in his boyhood synagogue. Anyone who tries to lead a Christian life today knows how true the Words of Christ, as recorded in John's gospel, are: "If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first". "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." Second, Christians must expect the unexpected. The Lord does not seek to make us comfortable. He wants to challenge us, awaken us. Third, we contemplate the stunning words which serve as a conclusion to today's gospel reading: "They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong". (Lk. 4:29)

Consider the growing number of places where Jesus is now unwanted, where his presence is regarded as offensive in our secular, unbelieving culture. In time, how many of us will be silenced, evicted or suffer an even worse fate?

Amen!