

February 4, 2018 Superstar Homily: Brothers and sisters, recently, the distinguished American actor and acclaimed director, Robert Redford shared his thoughts with a journalist about his long professional career. Now in his early eighties, the filmmaker could boast of having directed many critically praised motion pictures. A thoughtful man with a social conscience, Mr. Redford is known to be a staunch environmentalist and champion of many liberal causes. His many film projects often carry a social message. One thinks of films such as “Quiz Show”, “The River Runs Through It”, and Ordinary People. Yet the moral of his films is often overlooked because the public only sees him as a celebrity, a movie star, and one of the genuine superstars of the entertainment business. Mr. Redford considers his celebrity status as demeaning and distasteful. Even worse, as a “superstar”, he has little, if any, privacy. He is a serious man. He wants his message to be heard.

In 1970, the American public was introduced to the rock musical, “Jesus Christ, Superstar”. The lyricist of the musical is a self-acknowledged atheist, Tim Rice. In the mind of the composer, Jesus of Nazareth is a celebrity, a crowd pleaser, wonder worker and, in the end, a pathetic victim of his own making. To say the least, the portrait Mr. Rice depicts of Jesus is not flattering at all. Indeed, it is rather insulting! In the story, there is no resurrection. Jesus is neither Lord nor the Eternal Word of the Heavenly Father. He is a flawed person, unworthy of anyone responding to his call to be one of his disciples!

We learn from today’s gospel that the fame of Jesus is spreading. Those who heard Jesus speak were amazed at his teaching. “And the story of his doings at once spread through the whole of Galilee” . (Mk. 1:28) This may explain why “the whole town came crowding around the door”. Clearly all sorts of people want something from him. They regard him as a wonder worker. Recall the words in last Sunday’s gospel “He has command over the unclean spirits and they obey him” . (Mk.1:27) Is Jesus a “superstar”, a celebrity? The celebrities of today are unlikely to be condemned to death and later crucified! It that were true, they would have very few in their camp.

“Everyone is searching for you” (Jesus). (Mk. 1:37) It is interesting to note that in Mark’s gospel, the word “searching” occurs no less than nine times. But what is striking is that the ones who search for Jesus do so from the wrong motives. They are blind to the truth about his identity and mission. What they fail to realize is the significance of all his words and mighty deeds. In truth, they usher in the Kingdom. For Mark, the Good News about Jesus and what is truly decisive about Him is his suffering and death and the call to men to follow him. It seems as if all they want to do is to use him. Witnessing Jesus’ deeds of power is no guarantee a person comes to faith. If faith is not present, a miracle simply cannot happen.

Perhaps we can appreciate Jesus’ instruction to those he had healed that they not speak openly of his mighty deeds. Jesus has no interest in superstardom. That may also explain that on the morning following his miracles, “he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed”. (Mk.1:35)

Fulton Sheen once said of Jesus: “He is no superstar; He is a super scar”.

Amen!