

HOMILY 14th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021
A PROPHET NOT ACCEPTED IN HIS OWN FAMILIAR SCENE

Mk 6.1-6 Ez 2.2-5 2Cor 12.7-10

Isn't it an old story that familiarity is said to breed contempt, or at least neutrality, or being taken for granted? Along with this is the prophet not being accepted in his own country running along the same sort of lines, as old adages, providing an excuse for not paying attention to the discomfiting warnings and wake-up calls we often don't wish to hear!

It is interesting in history how visionary voices have been ridiculed, by types such as the flat earthers, then those who believed in the geocentric view of earth being at the centre of the universe, creationists and fundamentalists in general, or those who just don't want their boat rocked in any way. Yet, we are given minds and consciences, with which to think and question and act accordingly, with responsibility.

In my little *Book of Heroic Failures*, Stephen Pile tells how there was a fear of trains going so fast that they'd cause asphyxiation, and young Einstein was told that he'd never amount to anything, as he looked distractedly out of the school window, until he developed the theory of relativity, looking out of a tram window in Berne!!

So, some prophecies are false, but not so with Jesus, who constantly calls for a better humanity in transforming the world, as he demonstrates how that should come about, with compassion, healing and love. It's not a matter of you and me achieving perfection, but at least, in trying to move in the right direction.

The suffering prophetic voices are many throughout human history, and yet the change called for and foretold was inevitable, as with universal human rights, taking Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero, Eddie Mabo (as we acknowledge *NAIDOC* Week), and Nelson Mandela, as examples in our lifetime.

I suggest a contemporary illustration could be taken from what was first called the greenhouse effect, morphing into global warming, then into climate change. The denialists are still out there, despite the empirical evidence pointed out by the scientists who research such things. The melting of the polar ice cap regions is one example, and even this week's frazzling heat in Vancouver, Canada, or the extremes of Australian bushfires, could be seen as a warning, even though a one up event, like the latter two, may not be sufficient to draw definitive conclusions, on their own.

The bleaching effect on the Great Barrier Reef, unquestionably one of the natural wonders of the world, give cause for concern about our responsibility for caring for the environment, and Pope Francis has been very clear about this fact too, particularly with his 2015 prophetic encyclical *Laudato si*, with examples from the Amazonian rainforests to the wider world around us. We can't just take it for granted and let nature look after itself, whilst human activity contributes to its degradation.

Vested interests often enough get in the way as well. There is no denying that renewable energy is a sensible idea anyway, but traditional industries affected adversely at least financially, have a reason to resist change, which is a necessary part of life for all of us anyway, however we look at it. Remember, there was a time when the unbelievable idea was promoted that smoking could even be good for you. Then, when the evidence for the link between smoking and lung cancer was clear, there was still an unwillingness to accept the scientific facts by many, but particularly those who stood to profit literally from the status quo of ongoing tobacco production and so, smoking, despite the endangerment to human life, with both active and passive effects.

Just this week, I took a trip to country Victoria, to visit friends and escape the city for a brief time. It was interesting to go through the King Valley region, which is now full of vineyards and wineries, where once there were tobacco farms in the 1950's and 60's.

As an aside, the experience was also a reminder to me that there is so much beauty to appreciate in our own local native environment. I even got to Paradise Falls, out of Moyhu, where I'd never been before; it was well worth a look.

The second reading of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians reminds me of another adage that *what doesn't kill you makes you stronger*, but that's not to be recommended as a healthy approach to life! Paul is honest

enough to admit to his own inadequacies and weaknesses, without being too specific, but he does give us all hope for those times when we feel that we let ourselves and others down, through our own fault. Hence the need for Christian repentance and forgiveness are realities of discipleship and living out of our faith.

Likewise, Ezekiel is feeling a bit lost and let down, knowing he has a prophetic mission to fulfil, but where all is not going to be smooth sailing, with rejection and dejection as part of the deal, yet perseverance and faith called for. He is called to challenge God's people, the Israelites in Babylonian exile, who have become complacent, conforming with ritual observance, but without an underlying spirit of a living faith and good works.

And now in Mark's Gospel, after significant success in his public ministry of preaching, teaching, calming and healing, demonstrating his God-given power over the elements, sickness and even death, he returns to the home scene in Nazareth, where he is not even taken for granted, but publicly rejected, with the obvious question asked as to who does he think he is? In the earlier incidents of his exercise of power, there is a demonstration of faith in Jesus, before he acts, as with the daughter of Jairus and the afflicted woman, and even the demons of possession. Not so is the case out on the lake in the storm, but the disciples' faith in Jesus is restored with the coming of the calm. (In contrast, Luke's Gospel has Jesus' rejection at the very beginning of his public ministry.)

Brendan Byrne SJ puts it thus: *"Small town prejudice and narrow-mindedness blinker the perception of the reality that is before them... We should ask what corresponds to our understanding to this sense of captivity to demonic forces. We can see it as Jesus confronting all that seeks to control and dehumanise people, alienating them from God and from fellow human beings... The episode shows that the greatest enemy to faith can simply be... a refusal to believe that God's presence and God's power could come to us in so familiar a form as the person next door... Growth in the Spirit almost always show itself in the ability to recognize God more and more in the ordinary, the everyday."*

Ultimately, the prophetic voice of Jesus echoes through the ages, and his disciples should respond in faith, acting accordingly with generous, compassionate, loving and forgiving hearts.

john hannon

4th July 2021