

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time - B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Ezekiel 2:2-5

The Book of Ezekiel is one of four books of the major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel); the three greatest being Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. These three are now placed in chronological order in our Bibles, but the Talmud speaks of an earlier order in which Jeremiah was first and Isaiah was last: “Jeremiah is all doom; Ezekiel begins with doom but ends with consolation; while Isaiah is all consolation.” This early arrangement was built on moving from doom to hope with Ezekiel in the middle as the hinge (or dividing line) between the two. The book of Ezekiel itself divides into two equal parts: Chapters 1 through 24 are oracles of judgement against Israel; and chapters 25 through 28 propose a variety of words of support and hope.

Ezekiel (the name means “may God strengthen”) claims to have started his ministry in 593 B.C. and his last dated prophecy is in 571 B.C. What was going on during this time? In 598 B.C. the Babylonian army sacked Jerusalem and took King Jehochin prisoner. Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, appointed Zedekiah (Jehochin’s uncle) as king-regent. King Jehochin, the wealthy, and the craftsmen (along with Ezekiel) were deported to Babylon. Zedekiah planned a rebellion, this act broke his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. This time, the Babylonian siege lasted from 589 to 586 B.C. and wiped out all of Judah’s cities before taking Jerusalem itself (2 Kings 25; Jeremiah 37-45, 52).

The bulk of Ezekiel’s ministry took place between 593 and 586 B.C., during the reign of King Zedekiah and the period of devastation that followed the fall of Jerusalem. Our reading for today takes place early in Ezekiel’s ministry (about 593 B.C.).

² As he [the Lord] spoke to me, spirit entered into me

To bridge the gap between God and man, God’s spirit (*ruah*) enters into Ezekiel, strengthening him to be attentive to the message of God. The prophet could not endure a direct experience of God any more than Moses had (Exodus 33), which makes a divine empowering necessary. Compare this to Revelation 1:10.

and set me on my feet,

Ezekiel is conscious of being moved by the Spirit in his prophetic task.

and I heard the one who was speaking ³ say to me: Son of man,

There is no messianic connotation in the use here (this phrase is used 93 times in Ezekiel). Man, mortal flesh, is contrasted to God, immortal Spirit. They are different in substance, alike in form.

I am sending you to the Israelites, rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers

have revolted against me to this very day. ⁴ Hard of face and obstinate of heart are they to whom I am sending you. But you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD!

God charges Ezekiel with the mission to speak the word of God to a people so hardened in disobedience that they will not listen; rather, they will oppose him as a deadly enemy. But, as charged both in the call of Moses and Jeremiah, the prophet is to speak despite all opposition.

⁵ And whether they heed or resist – for they are a rebellious house – they shall know that a prophet has been among them.

The people may ignore the prophet's words even though they originate from God, but Ezekiel's presence speaks harsh realities that can not be ignored.

2nd Reading - 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

This is the fourth letter which Saint Paul has written to the Corinthians. The first is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9 but has been lost. The second is what we call 1 Corinthians and was written in the spring of A.D. 57. The third letter is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:4 and is also lost. What we know as 2 Corinthians is the fourth letter and is thought to have been written in the autumn of 57.

This week we are looking at the part of his letter (chapters 10 through 13) where Saint Paul addresses the lies being spread by his enemies (the Judaizers). Because those who have denied his authority are still living in Corinth, he deals item-by-item with the lies and gives the faithful more than enough arguments to answer his detractors. This rebuttal also acts as a preparation for his next, his third, visit to Corinth in early 58.

⁷ [T]hat I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated.

This is widely interpreted as a psychic or physical ailment, which in Jewish tradition, was caused by a demon or by Satan. However, "thorn" in the Old Testament means enemies (his persecutors have caused him great pain because it has caused hostility within the community). In either case, he feels that it is an impediment to his work as an apostle.

⁸ Three times

The number three is indicative of completion in Hebrew numerology, it should have been sufficient.

I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me,

Past tense – now he accepts.

⁹ but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

Grace is defined here as power in relation to weakness.

I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. ¹⁰ Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

He has accepted weakness as a means of gaining grace.

Gospel - Mark 6:1-6a

This account takes place early in Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. He is now in Nazareth, his home town. What we hear today is the story of Jesus' rejection by His own people. Parallel gospel accounts are Matthew 13:53-58; John 4:44; 6:42; 7:13, 15.

^{6:1} He departed from there and came to his native place, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands!

Reminiscent of the finding in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52) and teaching in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-28).

³ Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary,

A sign of derision. Jewish lineage is through the father. This is a round-about way of calling Him illegitimate.

“Jesus came as the son of a carpenter (Matthew 13:55). He was not physically attractive, just as the prophets had predicted of Him (Isaiah 53:2). He was merely a carpenter, making plows and yokes, and instructing us by such symbols of righteousness to avoid an inactive life.” [Saint Justin the Martyr (ca. A.D. 155), *Dialogue With Trypho The Jew*, 7,7].

and the brother of

“Brother” does not necessarily mean son of the same parents. Hebrew and Aramaic have no word for cousin or nephew, or other close male relative, other than “brother.” For example in Genesis 13:8 and 14:14, 16, Lot is called the brother of Abraham but Genesis 11:26-27 tells us that Lot's father was Haran who had the same father, Terah, as Abram (Abraham). This would make Abraham Lot's uncle.

James and Joses

The sons of Mary, the wife of Clopas (John 19:25).

and Judas

Son of James (Luke 6:16).

and Simon?

A Canaanite (Matthew 10:4).

When He was dying on the altar of the cross, Jesus entrusted his mother, Mary, to Saint John. If Mary had had other children, Hebrew tradition would have demanded that she be placed under their care.

And are not his sisters here with us?"

They aren't named but the same word is used for all female close relatives in Hebrew and Aramaic.

And they took offense at him. ⁴ Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house."

Jesus was in His own part of the country, surrounded by close relatives – cousins, aunts, uncles. People didn't move around much in those days.

⁵ So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them. ⁶ He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Not necessarily that He was unable to, but as punishment for unbelief. Remember, He had just come from three miracles (stilling the water, healing the sick, casting out demons) where He had been highly acclaimed.

“Two things must coincide for the reception of healing: the faith of those who need healing, and the power of him who will heal. If either of these are wanting, the blessing of a cure will not readily be attained.” [Pseudo-Victor of Antioch (5th century), *Commentary on Mark 6*].