

Familiarity Breeds Contempt

Ezek. 2: 3-5; Ps. 123; 2 Cor. 12: 7-10; Mk. 6: 1-6

Don't shoot the messenger! This is a phrase that we use when we are about to deliver bad news or an unpopular message. People don't like to receive bad news so the message is often rejected and the one who delivers the message is often the object of hatred.

In the sixth century before Christ, the Jewish people were conquered by the Babylonians and many of the people were taken captive and exiled to Babylon. God chose Ezekiel to be the first prophet to the Jews while they were in exile. Ezekiel prophesied to the people about their sinfulness and the coming destruction of Jerusalem. God knew that Ezekiel's message would be unpopular so He prepared Ezekiel by telling him not to fear rejection but to prophesy knowing that his message came directly from God.

In the Gospel, Jesus and His disciples come to Nazareth, the town where He grew up. Although He had taught and performed many miracles of healing in other places along the way, when Jesus began to teach in the synagogue, the people questioned His authority. Even after hearing His words and knowing about the miraculous events that had taken place at His hands, the people of Nazareth could not bring themselves to believe in Jesus. All they could remember was the child that had grown up in their midst and the carpentry work He had done with His father as He matured into a young man. They could not believe that someone who seemed so ordinary could say and do the things that He did.

'Familiarity breeds contempt' is a well-worn phrase to encapsulate what tends to happen when we see something every day. If we don't treat it with contempt, we may look on it with indifference or take it for granted. Because we have seen the CN Tower for many years, we may have started to take it for granted. We may walk past it every day without giving it a second glance. But, when people come to visit from out of town and see the CN Tower for the first time, they are astounded.

Both Ezekiel and Jesus suffered from the same liability when it came to being believed by the people. Both of them were seen to be ordinary men who were drawn from among the people. People could not believe that someone who appeared to be no different than them, someone whom they had known perhaps for their whole lives, could be elevated to the status of a prophet of God or, in the case of Jesus, the Messiah.

We may criticize the Jewish people for not listening to Ezekiel or the people of Nazareth for taking Jesus for granted but are we guilty of doing the same? Do we show true reverence for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist? Or have we received the Body of Christ under the appearance of that little wafer so often over so many years that we have become too familiar with it and have begun to take it for granted? Perhaps there are times when we have not fully realized that we have in our hands the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ, who gave Himself up for our salvation.

Perhaps, part of our tendency to take for granted something so profound and sacred is rooted in our need to be powerful and to be in control at all times. To acknowledge the supreme power of the Body and Blood of Christ in the appearance of the bread and wine would be to admit our own frailty and weakness. Let us not fear showing our weaknesses but join ourselves to St. Paul in saying: 'I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me' for 'whenever I am weak, then I am strong.' We need to become comfortable in our weakness and allow God's grace and power to work through us.