

## Reflection on the Sunday Readings

# FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

### Expectations

We can miss what is right in front of our noses because we expect something else. The real thing, the real person, the real opportunity is transparent. Our expectation blots out or blurs the durable reality. This has been our experience often enough. So we are not surprised by the failure of the people in Jesus' hometown. After all, he was so familiar. We wish they had seen Jesus not just as a neighbor, but as the bearer of salvation. We wish this for ourselves, too.

*FIRST READING: Jeremiah 1:4–5, 17–19    RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 71:1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 15, 17*  
*SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12:31 — 13:13 [13:4–13]    GOSPEL: Luke 4:21–30*

### Comment

The Gospel for this day gives us Jesus' homily, which was drawn from the prophetic reading from Isaiah. You will recall that in last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus stood up in his hometown synagogue and read the prophecy of Isaiah, which promised freedom from oppression and announced a time of salvation. The sentence that ended that Gospel is repeated at the beginning of this one: "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." If Jesus is the bringer of salvation, the assembly at Nazareth reasoned, why haven't they been favored with their hometown hero's healing powers? After all, this was his third visit home, and so far nothing extraordinary had occurred. Is he not, after all is said and done, just the son of Joseph, a boy they'd known all their lives?

Sensing this doubt and growing resentment, Jesus recalls that the great prophets Elijah and Elisha were also rejected by their own people for healing the outsider. Luke alone tells us this story to remind his first readers that God's saving power includes Israel, but not Israel alone. Salvation has come this day to the whole world. However, little Nazareth was not quite expecting this interpretation.

Jesus' expulsion from their midst is chilling. At the brow of the hill, Jesus draws himself to his full height, turns, and walks through the crowd, which parts and allows him to pass from this place to a larger arena.

### Reflection

Prophets are people who see deeply. Israel's prophets are uniquely possessed of God's vision for the world. The first reading tells of the call of the prophet Jeremiah, who is in many ways like Jesus. Both have a difficult calling or mission; both are treated harshly by their contemporaries; both carry within themselves a firm and abiding sense of God's power and protection. One could easily read the first reading and replace the name "Jeremiah" with "Jesus," keeping in mind that Jesus is a prophet and more than a prophet.

The second reading gives us some insight into the source of the power of God's people. Sandwiched between the two stories of the prophetic vocation, we read a passage that is among the most revered in all the Scriptures. Here, Paul sings of the virtue of love, the kind that Jeremiah and Jesus possessed—or that possessed and anchored Jeremiah and Jesus. Paul is sure that we, too, are capable of this kind of steadfast, inexhaustible love that outlasts prophecy, great talent and skill, even great acts of courage. The God who is author of this love is the same God who is Jeremiah's strength, the same God whom Jesus proclaims as a saving God.

## Reflection on the Weekday Readings

### MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1

#### Zombie no more

Life among the tombs is tough. Pope John Paul II used the phrase the “culture of death” to describe our world and its willingness to compromise the value of human life at every turn. In the litany of familiar ways—abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, war, torture, discrimination, research at the expense of life, economic exploitation—we devalue the likeness of God imparted to each person. This unrestrained death culture makes it easier to embrace violent options and policies of indifference rather than seeking peaceful solutions and the common good. Lose the tombs. Up with people!

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Samuel 15:13-14, 30; 16:5-13; Mark 5:1-20*

*“[The man] lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain.”*

### TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2

#### FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

#### When children are present

Like most parents, Mary and Joseph wanted the best for their child. They were faithful Jews and desired their son to be raised in the faith that had sustained them. They took Jesus to the Temple to be consecrated and presented to God, where they met Simeon and Anna, elders of the community. The elders immediately recognized Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel, a light to the whole world. What can you do this day to call forth the gifts of a child and encourage them to use their gifts to give light to the world?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Malachi 3:1-4; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22-32*

*“The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.”*

### WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

#### FEAST OF ANSGAR, BISHOP

#### Worth the effort

A highly effective missionary in ninth-century Scandinavia and northern Germany, Saint Ansgar's success apparently grew out of his preaching ability, the example of his holy life, and the miracles that happened through his intercession. Forces beyond his control, though, swept away many of his achievements. But in obtaining mixed results Ansgar was not alone. Jesus had run into his own problems in his home town. The people of Nazareth resented him and had trouble believing this local boy could speak and act with such wisdom and power. Because of their lack of faith, Jesus could work few wonders there. Your hard work can sometimes be undone or ignored. At such times remember that some pretty holy people met similar reactions. And know that good work, even if it's badly received, is worth doing well and may have long-term benefits not obvious at the time.

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Samuel 24:2, 9-17; Mark 6:1-6*

*“He could do no deed of power there . . . and he was amazed at their unbelief.”*

### THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4

#### Make sense of it all

Concern for Roman Catholic-Anglican relations has been in the headlines in recent months, but dialogue between the two traditions has been going on for a number of years. According to the Vatican's website, significant progress has been made on several fronts, including on the complex and delicate question of how authority should be exercised in the universal church. There is a mutual recognition, for instance, “that because of their baptism and their participation in the *sensus fidelium* [“the sense of the faithful”] the laity play an integral part in decision-making in the church.” Be active in your faith community and make your own contribution to shaping the *sensus fidelium*.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12; Mark 6:7-13*

*“He called the twelve . . . and gave them authority.”*

### FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5

#### Who is it?

Not everyone knew who Jesus was and what he was doing when he began his public ministry. You couldn't Google him or check out his Facebook page and he wasn't on Twitter. Some thought Jesus was Elijah or another prophet. King Herod sided with those who believed Jesus to be John the Baptist come back from the dead. Even without modern communications technology, though, the Gospel of Mark guides its readers to see how John looked ahead to Christ. People wanted both of them dead. Both were “righteous and holy” men. And the mistaken assumption that John had been raised foreshadowed the real resurrection of Jesus to come. You have the challenge as well to see and follow the real Jesus.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Sirach 47:2-11; Mark 6:14-29*

*“When Herod heard of it, he said, ‘John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.’ ”*

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**Readings for next Sunday's Liturgy: February 7:** Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8; Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11.