

Reflections on the Gospel



THE SAVING WORD

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME / C

03 FEBRUARY 2019

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Lk 4:18

Alleluia, alleluia! The Lord sent me to bring Good News to the poor and freedom to prisoners. Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Lk 4:21-30

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

Jesus, like Elijah and Elisha, was not sent only to the Jews.

Jesus began to speak in the synagogue, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.' And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips.

They said, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?' But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself" and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own countryside." ' And he went on, 'I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country.

'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a Sidonian town. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of these was cured, except the Syrian, Naaman.'

When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him down the cliff, but he slipped through the crowd and walked away.

■ The Gospel of the Lord.

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THE CHALLENGE OF CONVERSION

Today's Gospel gives us the second act, so to speak, of Jesus' visit to his hometown, Nazareth.

At first, the reaction of his townsfolk is favourable. They are 'astonished at the gracious words that came from his lips'. But their comment, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?', disturbs him. It shows misunderstanding of his status and mission. He begins to challenge them, citing biblical precedents (the prophetic careers of Elijah and Elisha) for a wide-ranging mission. The scene turns ugly and ends with an unsuccessful attempt to lynch him. Why does it all so suddenly go wrong?

As a gospel writer Luke is very concerned to depict human response to the message of Jesus and to probe the reasons that led so many to reject it. The message requires conversion at depth. When the Nazarenes say, 'Isn't this Joseph's son?', they are simply putting Jesus back in a box with which they are comfortable and keeping him for themselves. They show no real sense of who he really is (*God's Son*) or any grasp of the inclusive scope of the program he has announced. The reason Jesus responds so aggressively is to bring their deepest thoughts to the surface and make them confront their narrowness.

The Gospel illustrates the potential for violence that lies in every human heart when the limits of comfort and convention are challenged. The threat to his life that Jesus experiences in Nazareth will become an actuality later in Jerusalem. But there too, in resurrection and ascension, he will 'pass through the midst and go on his way'.

Brendan Byrne, SJ

FIRST READING

Jer 1:4-5, 17-19

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah

I have appointed you as prophet to the nations.

In the days of Josiah, the word of the Lord was addressed to me, saying,

'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I have appointed you as prophet to the nations. So now brace yourself for action. Stand up and tell them all I command you.

Do not be dismayed at their presence, or in their presence I will make you dismayed. I, for my part, today will make you into a fortified city, a pillar of iron, and a wall of bronze to confront all this land: the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests and the country people. They will fight against you but shall not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you – it is the Lord who speaks.'

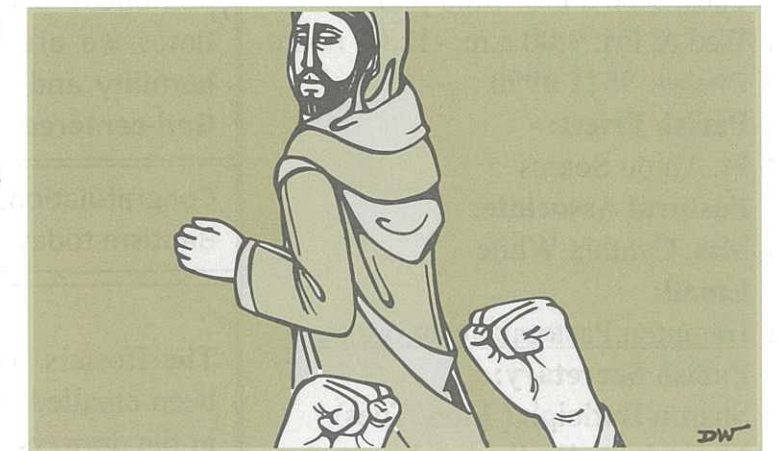
■ The word of the Lord.

RESP PSALM

Ps 70:1-6, 15, 17. R. v. 15

R. I will sing of your salvation.

1. In you, O Lord, I take refuge; / let me never be put to shame. / In your justice rescue me, free me: / pay heed to me and save me. **R.**
2. Be a rock where I can take refuge, / a mighty stronghold to save me; / for you are my rock, my stronghold. / Free me from the hand of the wicked. **R.**
3. It is you, O Lord, who are my hope, / my trust, O Lord, since my youth. / On you I have leaned from my birth, / from my mother's womb you have been my help. **R.**
4. My lips will tell of your justice / and day by day of your help. / O God, you have taught me from my youth / and I proclaim your wonders still. **R.**



SECOND READING

1 Cor 13:4-13.

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians

There are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.

Love is always patient and kind: it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence, and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes.

Love does not come to an end. But if there are gifts of prophecy, the time will come when they must fail; or the gift of languages, it will not continue for ever; and knowledge – for this, too, the time will come when it must fail. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect; but once perfection comes, all imperfect things will disappear. When I was a child, I used to talk like a child and think like a child, and argue like a child, but now I am a man, all childish ways are put behind me. Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known.

In short, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.

■ The word of the Lord.

Longer form, 1 Cor 12:31–13:13