COLLECT PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

FIRST BIBLE READING EZEKIEL 2:1-5

The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. When I saw this, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone speaking. He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’ 5 Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

SECOND READING 2 CORINTHIANS 2:2-10

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven –  whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows –  was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

GOSPEL READING

Jesus came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, ‘Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.’ So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

REFLECTION

In our relationships with professionals or traders we often rely upon reputation or qualifications to reassure and guide us, but many people choose those they don’t know particularly well for important working relationships - we don’t seem to like the idea of mixing business with pleasure,

Sometimes when we want to tell someone about very personal things we go to someone we don’t know and won’t meet in the course of our normal day - a counsellor, or the anonymous barman when you’ve had a few to drink.

The passage from Mark’s Gospel today tells of the people of Nazareth disliking the idea of the kid they’d seen grow up among them, suddenly trying to teach them something new about the faith and the spiritual life.

They ‘took exception to’ and rejected Jesus - the very people who knew him and his mother and his brothers and sisters very well couldn’t - or wouldn’t - mix the safe, familiar social side of village life with one of their own taking liberties and getting above his station, pretending to have acquired divine wisdom.

The people of Nazareth were not prepared to consider that Jesus had anything of value to teach them, simply because they knew him so well. Familiarity, as they say, breeds contempt.

There were other times during his ministry when Jesus saw his message being rejected and his ministry apparently failing - notably among the Scribes and the Pharisees, the keepers of the faith and the very people who you’d expect to understand and accept the message of the Messiah. The rejection in Nazareth didn’t discourage him though, and he was able to use his experience of failure to prepare his disciples for the possibility of rejection and apparent failure when he sent them out to minister to the surrounding villages.

When God sent the prophet Ezekiel to preach to the people of Israel he told him, “Whether they hear or refuse to hear, *they shall know that there has been a prophet among them*”. In similar fashion Jesus and his disciples knew that their job was just to preach and teach the message of love - it was not their responsibility how people responded.

Living the Christian life involves very much the same thing. Our role in our communities is simply to be consistent in living out the message of Jesus: whatever other people think of us and our Christian way of life, *they will know that there have been prophets among them.*

God often chooses people who are of no reputation at all in the eyes of the world; those who are seen as weak or of no consequence to be the ones to share his message of love and grace by living it out in their everyday lives, so that it is the message that speaks for itself, stirring the hearts of those who witness it, rather than any verbal eloquence or persuasiveness.

Very often those who are most fitted for understanding and sharing this message are those who have been overlooked, ignored, discounted by others, precisely because they know what it feels like to want and need love, but to be denied it.

The woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair was considered a woman of ‘low reputation’ - but her actions demonstrated a capacity for love - and for expressing love - beyond that of many people.

St Paul once wrote, “To keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from getting above myself. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that any power in me may be the power of Christ alone. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; because whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”*

Questions for further thought:

* Do I set too much store by what people think of me and my reputation? -does the thought of criticism or failure make me shy away from living out my faith overtly?
* Those who rejected Jesus’ message didn’t want their lives to be disturbed by his new message of living lives of love. In what ways do we do the same, choosing comfortable social familiarity rather than the challenge of the Way of Christ?

CLOSING PRAYER

God of our pilgrimage, you have led us to the living water: refresh and sustain us as we go forward on our journey, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.