

The Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 4, 2021

Throughout the New Testament we see Jesus performing mighty deeds. He opened the eyes of the blind, made the deaf hear again, and the lame walk. With great power, He calmed storms and even raised the dead. Demons obeyed Him and came out of people at the voice of His command. In so doing, Jesus showed that He was the Almighty God who came to earth to set us free from the power of evil.

Despite all the healings and acts of power we see Jesus perform, there is one thing that stops Him in His tracks and ties His hands. There is one thing He will not do. He will not act where there is a lack of faith.

In fact, whenever Jesus does heal someone, He credits it to their faith rather than to His power. Last week, we heard the story of Jesus' miraculous cure of a woman who was suffering from a hemorrhage. When she is cured, He tells her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you." It is for those who have faith that Jesus performs His mighty works.

On the other hand, when people show a lack of faith, Jesus does not work wonders. That is the case in today's gospel. In contrast to the woman who showed great faith by reaching out to Jesus to be healed last week, the people of Nazareth are astonished by Jesus but do not have faith in Him. They thought they knew Him. They knew where He grew up, they knew His family, and they might even have been able to show us the carpentry work He had done in town. They couldn't stop asking themselves, "Who does He think He is?" To them, He was just another local like they were. And so, St Mark states plainly, "He was not able to perform any mighty deeds there."

The powers of nature couldn't stop Jesus. Sickness and death couldn't stop Jesus. Crowds, soldiers, and the Roman authorities couldn't stop Jesus. Neither could demons or the Devil himself. As it turns out, the only people who can keep Jesus from doing mighty deeds are those who lack faith.

Don't the people of Nazareth in today's gospel sound like the people of our own day? They are not necessarily against Jesus. They just think that they already know all about Him. They have heard the gospel stories and have an impression that Jesus was a good teacher. But, to most people, Jesus is just one teacher among many. They feel free to pick and choose which of His teachings suit their lifestyle and reject whatever makes them uncomfortable. They do not have faith in Him as the Son of God, as the One sent by God to save them. For that reason, Jesus cannot do mighty deeds for them.

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If we were honest with ourselves, we might hear in our own hearts an echo of the voices of the people of Nazareth. Though we come to Mass every Sunday - and maybe even every day - we might not really expect anything miraculous to happen. There may be times when we're so distracted by what we need to do later on today or this week that we don't remember what the readings were about. Even when we receive Our Lord in the Eucharist, we might be thinking about everything else except that the Creator of the Universe has humbled Himself to enter into communion with us. No doubt, all of us have grieved Jesus many times because of our lack of faith in His word and in the Blessed Sacrament.

As a Church, we too, have grieved Jesus by our lack of faith. So many times, we water down the hard truths of Jesus' word because we don't want to offend people. We tell ourselves that people aren't ready to hear what Jesus taught about the dignity of human life, the meaning of our sexuality, and the vocation to marriage. In fact, what we're really afraid of - is being rejected and criticized. We tell ourselves that we have to make the gospel relevant to people today. But what can be more relevant than the message that we are loved by God and that Jesus died to save us? Perhaps, we're really not so sure about it ourselves. And so we hold back, just in case it turns out we're wrong.

Because of our lack of faith, Jesus' hands are tied. People are not converted because we haven't told them the whole truth. The world does not confess that Jesus is Lord because we haven't proclaimed that truth boldly. The sick aren't cured, the poor aren't fed, and the needy are not raised up because we haven't given our lives totally to Jesus believing that He can be found in the poor among us.

Jesus wants so much more for us. He wants us to believe wholeheartedly and without reservation. He wants us to give our lives totally to Him without holding anything back. He wants us to surrender our hearts to Him. We can do that when we believe that He is good, that He loves us, and that He wouldn't do anything to hurt us. We can do that when we believe that His love is greater than anything the world can offer. We can do that when we choose faith over fear, hope over despair, and love over indifference.

We see it over and over again in the gospels. Great things happen when people believe. And it doesn't take much faith for Jesus to work wonders in our lives. Jesus said that it only takes faith as small as a mustard seed to do great things (Lk 17:6). It happens over and over again in our world when people put aside their own needs to serve others. They do so because they believe that God will take care of them. Even when it seemed that they didn't have enough for themselves, they gave to others

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because they believed Jesus' words that it would be given back to them one hundred times over. It happens when men and women choose to serve God in the priesthood and religious life, believing that nothing else in this world could be more fulfilling than bringing the good news to the world. And it happens in us whenever we entrust our needs to God in prayer and rest in the confidence that He has heard us and will not let us down.

A great thing will happen here today. The Risen Jesus is in our midst. He comes to us as He came to the people of Nazareth looking to see if we have any faith. If we do, we can expect great things, even miraculous healings and conversions. We can expect to see it here today, if we welcome Jesus with faith and entrust ourselves to Him with confidence.