

GREAT EXPECTATIONS
4th Sunday in OT, January 30, 2022
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“Life is made up of so many partings welded together.”

“I must be taken as I have been made. The success is not mine.

The failure is not mine but the two together make me.”

“Ask no questions, you’ll be told no lies.”

There are but a few quotes from the 1861 novel “Great Expectations” by Charles Dickens. His book has been adapted over and over again for movies, television shows and even Broadway plays.

Expectations are a curious thing. Sometimes they are helpful like when our boss lays out goals and how to achieve them. Other times, expectations can be disappointing especially when it comes to

relationships. Sometimes, expectations are verbalized like when a person of authority says, “I expect this project to be done by such-and-such and done ‘X’ way.” Often relationship expectations are kept to

ourselves yet we expect our spouses, friends and co-workers to be mind readers. When these unknown expectations are not met, we find

ourselves frustrated and angry even though the person has no idea that we've placed an expectation upon them. We tell ourselves, "Reality is not living up to my expectations" and this misplaced perception has been the basis for many a divorce and may a failed friendship.

Today, our reading picks up where we left off last Sunday. Jesus is in back in his hometown, the place where he grew up. Nazareth is so small it's not even called a city or a town but instead is referred to as a village. The population was about two to four hundred. The people lived in homes carved out of soft limestone. It is Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. Jesus most likely finds this a place of safety and peace... he has read from the Torah in this synagogue since he was 13. He chooses to read a messianic prophecy from Isaiah. And, at first, the people... his neighbors and friends, are amazed as he speaks with authority. Then, then, they begin to understand what Jesus is saying and they ask, "Isn't this the son of Joseph the Carpenter?" Isn't is the same boy who ran along the streets of Nazareth, who played stick ball with his friends... if he is the son of a carpenter, then he should be a carpenter, certainly

not a rabbi... after all, these people knew Jesus for the 30 years he lived with them. These were the expectations of the people... a people that distrusted change and treasured stability... therefore, a son always follows in his father's footsteps, which the citizens did not understand that's exactly what Jesus was doing.

This failure to meet expectations angers the people, angers them greatly that Jesus would claim to be the Messiah... he's really just an unemployed, homeless carpenter. They become an irate mob and they challenge Jesus: "Physician, cure yourself." The town's folk have heard about the miracles Jesus supposedly performed while he was in Capernaum. They've heard that he's an accomplished teacher with a growing following. They demand, if he is who he claims to be, that he does the same here in Nazareth. They are demanding that Jesus put on a show for them... they are saying "prove it!"

Jesus sees their lack of faith and relates two stories highlighting other times when the Jewish people lacked faith. These stories centered around great prophets Elijah and Elisha, and in both stories,

the prophets did not come to the Jewish people but to Gentiles... non-Jews. For 17 centuries, the Jews have been God's chosen people and they are proud of their superiority over the sinful Gentiles. Now, Jesus, the hometown boy, not only dares to infer he's the Messiah but now a prophet on the same level as Elijah and Elisha... and he says he comes not only for the chosen Jewish people but also for Gentiles! The inflamed crowd is now incensed. They drag Jesus out of the synagogue and to the edge of cliff where they intend to push him off... to murder him! But... it is not yet Jesus' time and he walks through the crowd to safety... his own people, the ones he grew up with, the ones that he's known all his life, turn their backs on him and throw him out of town all because Jesus didn't meet their expectations of the man they thought that he should be. I suspect this rejection greatly saddened Jesus.

Yes, expectations are a curious thing. Frustration can be borne out of unmet expectations. We want something to happen so we look to others or to things for fulfillment. What are our expectations when we come to Mass? Do we expect to be entertained? Do we expect to

have an encounter with the risen Christ? And what of our prayer life? Are we expecting God to fulfill our prayer requests when we have not verbalized them? For some, spontaneous prayer can be a challenge, it can be hard and instead of simply having a friendly conversation with Jesus, we rely on prepared prayers which, I want to be perfectly clear, have a useful and meaningful place in our faith lives and our Church. That being said, Jesus wants to hear what is in our hearts... what are we thankful for, what are we angry about, what our needs are, who needs healing, who needs blessing... and, many times, prayer cannot be a “one and done.” We need to pray regularly, frequently. We need only look to Jesus as an example... when he wasn’t teaching, healing or sleeping, Jesus was praying. Prayer is never wasted even when our minds wander and we feel that we’ve gotten off track... there is no such thing as “bad prayer.” Prayer binds us to God, magnifies our faith, reinforces our soul against the onslaught of evil, draws us into that heavenly relationship, that friendship with Jesus... prayer gives us the hope, the belief that we never walk through this life alone.

It's important for us to evaluate what we are expecting from our family, friends, our Church and clergy, even our God, and, yes, ourselves. Are they unrealistic? Are they too high or too low? Am I effectively communicating my needs and desires on a routine basis? Expectations *are* a curious thing and always hard to fulfill. But, it's important to remember that our faith is not based on expectations but on a relationship with God solidified through prayer. We must recognize the difference between the two... when we expect more, we receive more... through God's grace our lives can be transformed into the *accepting* people of the Good News that is Jesus Christ!