

14th Sunday, year B, Xavier Church, Ez. 2, 2-5; Ps. 123, 1-4; 2 Cor. 12, 7-10; Mk. 6, 1-6

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Dear brothers and sisters, St. Paul speaks of a thorn in his flesh that has been given to him. Many theologians have wondered what he means by this. Is he talking about a particular disease, or about temptations that befall him? The answer that Jesus gives to Paul, however, is much more relevant than the affliction he may have suffered from: My grace is sufficient for you.

Paul speaks of extraordinary revelations that could make him arrogant. Apparently, he has received many graces in his life. And then Jesus says: power is made perfect in weakness. Why is this so? I think because many people will recognise this very human weakness. If you can speak so honestly and from a faithful heart like St. Paul despite your weakness, then you will appeal to many people.

In the other two readings, it is also about people who speak convincingly to others, but who are not really taken seriously. In the Gospel we hear that Jesus is not honoured in His own city, Nazareth. The way He speaks, all seems too familiar to the inhabitants of that town. They look at his family, his origins and decide that not much good can come from it. In doing so, they overlook the real power of Jesus, so that He cannot perform many miracles there. Jesus' power reveals itself in sincere care for one's fellow man, from utter honesty and loyalty and, above all, from divine grace, which is given to man for nothing.

In the first reading, we hear about the prophet Ezekiel, who is sent to an obstinate and rebellious people. This prophet is an extraordinary figure. At the beginning of this biblical book, he receives a vision and he hears a voice speaking to him that leaves him dumbfounded. He is summoned to proclaim the word of the Lord to the people of Israel, and there is nothing else he can do.

Ezekiel speaks of the return of the people of Israel from exile to their land, where they will put an end to idolatry. There will be a new temple. And best of all: a new heart will be given to them and a new spirit will be poured out in their hearts. This is the hope that lives in the prophet.

How different it is in our time, in our country, where no new temple is being built, but rather churches are being closed. Fortunately, here in Amsterdam things go rather well, but we don't have to go far to hear about church closures. In our part of the world, Christianity seems to have become so self-evident that we act as if we no longer need it. We have hospitals, schools, social security, care for the elderly, everything.

The fact that many of these facilities have a Christian background hardly seems to matter anymore. But if they were to disappear, our society would fall apart. It does take a humane attitude, a great deal of faith and perseverance to preserve what is good in the face of indifference, relativism and open aversion. When a society is based only on freedom, then individualism and technocracy lurk. Then, people are in danger of being reduced to a citizen service number in a society where everyone has to manage on their own. Then, families and the voluntary sector fall apart.

Dear brothers and sisters, in their time, Jesus, the prophets and the apostles also carried on in the face of opposition. Despite their well-known origins, which made them mistrusted, and despite their human limitations and weakness. They continued to stand up for the weak, for those who had to live with all kinds of limitations. Throughout the centuries, they pleaded for solidarity with minority groups, for subsidiarity, this is responsibility for the people themselves rather than a dominance of state-centred authority and finally, for an attitude of respect for God's creation. And then what turns out to be the case: divine grace is sufficient to overcome human limitations. Amen.