



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

January 30, 2022

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

We can all find ourselves in a situation where everything seems to be going along fine and then, suddenly, they take a turn for the worst. Sometimes that turn for worst can be due to an unexpected change in people's attitude towards us. An initial positive response from them turns out quite negative. The most extreme expression of that move towards thinking the worst is when initial acceptance to anger becomes rejection. We can be left wondering why things went wrong. We begin to question ourselves, Is the fault with me or with them or both?

As we all know from our own experiences, even a sincere loving relationship can turn sour. The consequence from that change to the worst, can be very upsetting to those directly involved, but also for many other, family and friends as well. That sort of scenario, which is not uncommon in human relationships, is portrayed in today's gospel reading. Jesus was a member of the small village community of Nazareth, in the hill country of Judea. Both Jesus and his father were carpenters, they knew his mother. The village community must have benefitted from their work. But now at around the late age of 30 or so, Jesus left home in response to God's call to begin his public ministry, which was centered down near the Sea of Galilee. And he has been preaching and healing all along that region.

Today's gospel reading describes his return to his native village for the first time since he left to take up this ministry. He preached in the local synagogue and, initially, the people of Nazareth warmly received him and what he had to say. The gospel reading says that 'they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips'. Then, rather suddenly, the mood of Jesus' townspeople seems to have changed. The question, 'this is Joseph's son, surely?' implies that Jesus was extending above his social class somewhat. Who does this carpenter's son think he is, preaching to us? They put him in his place, 'Physician, heal yourself' which is a real put down. Put your own life in order before preaching to us, is their message. Jesus picks up on this attitude change, concluding that 'no prophet is ever accepted in his own country'. The people's initial response of admiration and astonishment now turns to anger and rage, as they dare to throw Jesus down the cliff of the town it was built on. It is hard to conceive of a greater shift in love, in such a relatively short time. The people who had been so significant for Jesus in the first thirty years of his life, now becomes his public enemies.

Both emotions of love and anger display admiring acceptance or enraged rejection, as you learn through the scripture today, both feelings can reside within the same group of people, and in everyone who makes up a group. Both extremes of emotion reside in each of us, there is more than one side to all of us. Maybe some people can be a little more hot-tempered than others, but we are probably all aware of our capacity to change moods drastically and quickly. Sometimes our mood change can be caused by a sense of something deep within us being undermined or threatened in some way. That seems to have been the cause of the mood change among the people of Nazareth. Jesus was undermining their understanding of God. They were the perceived "Chosen People", and now Jesus is preaching a God of all people, a God of love and inclusion, of Jew and Gentile. He was trying to show them that God was so much bigger, so much more loving, than they realized. He wasn't just their God, but he was the God of all people. Israel had thought of itself as the chosen people too long, but Jesus was now revealing a God who was choosing all of humanity without distinction.

There is nothing narrow about the love of God that Jesus reveals, the God in whom we say we believe. Here is a God whose love, in the words of Saint Paul in the second reading, *delights in the truth, wherever truth is to be found*. Indeed, we could replace the word 'Love' in that second reading with the word 'God' and we would have a wonderful portrayal of the God whom Jesus revealed by his life, death, and resurrection. This is the God that Jesus invites us to keep entrusting ourselves to, especially at those moments in life, when, like Jesus in the gospel reading, we experience misunderstanding and, even, rejection, from those who have been significant in our lives and now shift their mood, because you don't fit their personal expectations.