

Sunday 15-B5 by Fr. Gabor

In the past two weeks the readings dealt with the theme of giving witness to our experience of God and in particular to giving witness from a weak position, ie. not as if we were superior to anybody, or as if we knew better than others, and not as if people whose life is secured by wealth. The readings also reminded us that we should get out of our comfortable life style, because Jesus wants to send us to give witness to his mercy and love to people who may reject us or verbally abuse us or take away our inner peace. Last Sunday we heard that God sent Ezekiel to a rebellious, defiant and obstinate society. It is not difficult to find that rejection and defiant attitude in today's society and church either. Jesus is despised in his own town by his own people, and in today's first reading Amos, the prophet of God, is rejected by Amaziah and told by him to go away back to his own country. I myself experienced this in 2015. In today's Gospel reading Jesus warns his disciples before he sends them out to their first missionary journey that their peace may be taken away by the people of the towns where they would enter and that they may not be welcomed. But remember what Jesus says: 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me', Mt 5:11. Perhaps this is why only a few people in the Church dare to give witness to Jesus and his power in today's society and so the church is shrinking. (Nightfever had to be cancelled)

So why would Jesus want the disciples to give witness and do it from a weak position in which they can be rejected and even abused? We find the answer in Jesus' words to St. Paul's which we read last Sunday: 'My grace is enough for you: my power is at its best in weakness.' If I interpret the word weakness as humility and vulnerability it becomes clear that we are not talking about weakness of character, but about lack of all the worldly means of authority and power, such as money, influence, control over others, force, aggression, arrogance, egoism and pride which are the worldly means to defend ourselves and show how powerful we are.

On the other hand a person who is humble and vulnerable in the Biblical sense of the word relies only on things that the Lord gives, because he/she trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ's love and support for him, and so he or she dares to take the risk of humility and vulnerability in order to give witness to God. Through the words, action, and entire life of such a person you can gradually sense the peace of God; the wisdom of God, the joy of God and the authority of God. This is what the words of Jesus in the Gospel reading mean when he tells the disciples not to take anything for the journey, except a staff, which is the symbol of a higher authority that they have received from Jesus' - this is what the Bishop's staff also symbolise - then he also tells the disciples: 'do not even take any food or money' ; in other words rely on God's providence that may come to you through people. This actually works today as well. I remember there was a BBC documentary on a Franciscan monk in England who walked from the South to the North of England, taking with him only some essentials, to test if it was

possible to survive in today's society purely through showing Jesus' love to people and through their response in the form of giving food or even shelter. He travelled over a 100 miles through villages and towns and guess what: he experienced exactly the same as those disciples whom Jesus sent out: some people considered him as a pest and merely a beggar, and sent him away with some spicy words, but most people responded positively and gave him food and shelter.

He made himself powerless so that the power of God may shine forth through his words and love to those strangers. As the book of Isaiah says: 'He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak' (40:29) and again in Psalm 29:11: 'The LORD gives His people strength; the LORD blesses His people with peace.' The strength and power that He gives us is the Holy Spirit. If we do not use his strength it will not manifest itself in ourselves, but there is one thing about the strength of the Holy Spirit: we should not try to control it and use it for our own benefits and purposes, because it will never work. As long as you make yourself humble and vulnerable before God and seek to do his will in the form of good works the strength of the Holy Spirit will be activated in you and will come through your words, through touch, through your smile and through your eyes. That is worth more than any highfaluting theology. The good thing is that all of us are capable of such goodness in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.