

8. March 2021

**“The prophets have it hard”**

*Lk 4:24-30*

*And he went on, 'In truth I tell you, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. 'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a town in Sidonia. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many suffering from virulent skin-diseases in Israel, but none of these was cured - only Naaman the Syrian.' When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him off the cliff, but he passed straight through the crowd and walked away.*

It does not seem easy with the prophets, neither for them, because they often find unwilling hearts and have to say things that do not please the listeners, nor for those who are supposed to listen to them. The presence of God in them is very strong, and this gives rise to a demand to listen to them. This is how it was in Israel. The prophets are not like the appointed priesthood, which is then a fixed institution according to certain rules. Rather, they are a direct choice of God and often do not correspond to the ideas of the people in their message and in their appearance.

So it is with Jesus and the people of Nazareth. Jesus points out to them that the prophets who were sent to them often found very little faith. They were persecuted again and again (*cf. e.g. Jer 38:4-6*). Even healings, as Jesus mentions, often could not happen because there lacked faith. In another passage of the Gospel it is said that he could not do many miracles in Nazareth (*cf. Mt 13:58*).

If prophets as a whole have a hard time being heard, then - as the Lord makes clear in today's text - there is another important element when the prophet works “*in his own country*”, when people think they know him and his family (*cf. Mt 13:54-57a*). For some people, such a circumstance then seems even less acceptable. If you know someone, you think you can classify him. When something extraordinary - like a prophetic calling - is revealed by God, it is met with incomprehension and even rejection. The Gospel reports in another place that even

Jesus' own relatives “*set out to take charge of him; they said, 'He is out of his mind.'*” (Mk 3:21)

It is not easy for God to find a hearing with us, be it through prophets, but also in other ways. One can see it clearly with Jesus himself. It was well known that he had done many miracles, special healings had happened. They were the talk of the town (cf. Mt 4:23-24). The presence of God in him was abundantly witnessed. And yet he had to experience that they even wanted to kill him in Nazareth! What had he done to them? Disappointed their expectations?

The deeper point is that Jesus himself is the truth (cf. Jn 14:6) and those prophets whom the Lord addressed testified to this truth. But the truth carries within itself the claim to follow it. We are thus led into a decision-making situation when we encounter a true prophet. This is even truer when we meet the Lord.

If our heart is free, then we open ourselves to the truth, then we hear his voice (cf. Jn 18:37). But if it is not free, then we close ourselves off. It can even go so far that we want to silence the bearer of truth, in extreme cases even kill him.

The Holy Scriptures make the matter clear to us:

*“And light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognise him. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him.”* (Jn 1:5, 9-11)

Let us realise that the persecution of Jesus came first through the leaders of His own people (cf. Jn 11:47-48.53). and also the persecution of His disciples, the persecution of the young community of Christians came by the Jews (cf. e.g. Acts 4:1-3).

So Jesus is openly speaking a sad truth here, that no prophet is recognised in his homeland, “*no prophet is ever accepted in his own country*” and the reaction of his listeners in the synagogue proves this. It will hardly be any different today.

Truth has a hard time. A web of lies and deceptions wants to suppress it.

Let us be careful to distinguish the true from the false prophets. We gladly open our ears to those who strengthen us in the testimony of Holy Scripture, in the

authentic teaching of the Church and on the path of holiness, but we close our ears to those who want to lead us in other ways.