

HOMILY
ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHER PROWSE
CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN
ST CHRISTOPHER'S CATHEDRAL
7TH JULY 2024
FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)
AND MASS ONLINE

Readings

Ezk 2:2-5

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Gospel Mark 6:1-6

Perhaps you are familiar with the proverb, "Familiarity breeds contempt."

This means that closeness can lead to a loss of respect. In other words, too much knowledge can lead to taking others for granted. We see this particularly, don't we, in our family relationships. We are with each other all the time and sometimes this familiarity can breed all sorts of disrespectful arguments.

A similar thing could be said in the Scriptures. Particularly in today's Scriptures. We could say that not only does familiarity breed contempt but it also breeds a loss of faith.

The Old Testament Reading today describes the beginning of the Ministry of the Prophet Ezekiel.

Prophets always bring people home to their true reality and identity. In a sense they are radical traditionalists. They basically say to God's people, in uncompromising terms, "You lack respect and faith in God!" They call people to conversion and repentance. They normally get a very negative reaction from people which results in so many of the prophets killed in the service of their Prophetic Ministry. In this case Ezekiel is saying that the people have taken God for granted which leads to them taking themselves too seriously. When you take your eyes off God you tend to put your eyes on yourself, we make ourselves into some sort of God. This is the essence of rebellion which is the quintessential understanding of Biblical sin. Today's First Reading uses the words "Revolt...defiant...obstinate..."

A similar taking for granted can be seen in today's Gospel from Mark.

Recall over the last few weeks in Mark's Gospel we have witnessed the great triumphs of Jesus in preaching and healing. But, now He goes back to His home town of Nazareth. Recall that in the Lord's 33 years of life here on earth it was only the last three years that He was in Public Ministry, He spent 30 years in the little village of Nazareth. Everybody knew everybody as is the same in our own country towns! When Jesus arrives and begins preaching the people were "astonished when they heard him."

Rather than leading to faith, it leads to a lack of faith and disrespectful comments. There is more than just a slur in their comments that question His origins and the humility and littleness of His background. They say, "This is the carpenter." It is like saying, "He is just simply a handyman. How could he have such wisdom." Another slur is when they say, "Surely, the son of Mary." The Scripture Scholars observe that Joseph is not mentioned. This leads us to believe that Joseph had already died but it does bring out the point that they are gossiping about somewhat "suspicious" origins of Jesus regarding Mary's conception.

As for Jesus, we hear that "he was amazed at their lack of faith." He was unable to work any miracles because where there is no faith there can be no healing.

May this never be said of us in our Christian communities. May we never be so familiar with the presence of Christ in our midst that we become contemptuous and disrespectful of the centrality of Christ in our lives. Through conversion and repentance may we always see "Only Jesus."

With these reflections, let us turn our thoughts to the observance of today which is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday. Our dear Aboriginal friends have offered the title for today's observance around Australia, "Keep the fire burning; strong in faith." Like the Biblical themes of today, our familiarity with our Aboriginal friends can produce a lack of respect and even a lack of faith.

It is about one year now since the Constitutional Referendum lapsed so spectacularly. At the same time, the socio economic indicators of our Aboriginal First Australians are still deplorable, especially regarding incarceration in our prisons.

We in Australia too easily politicise our friendship with our First Australians. Everything in their regard seems to end up in dead end streets because it moves into an excessively political focus which tends to scatter rather than unite us.

One example comes to mind. In recent months I attended a function organised by the Government. There were quite a lot of short speeches from political figures. Every one of them stood up and made an Acknowledgment of Country.

I myself am very keen on Acknowledgment of Country but not in an overly politicised way! For over six speakers in the course an hour and a half to stand up and make an Acknowledgment of Country moves towards tokenism and a patronising of our First Australians. I note that once this "box" was ticked none of the substance of the input made any reference to Aboriginal matters.

Let us certainly acknowledge our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whenever appropriate, but in this move towards respect let us not be disrespectful and tokenistic in our relations. This only sets us back as we have seen in other initiatives over the decades.

One way I like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for example, is not to use the politically correct formula but to make other comments that acknowledge how we take our first Australians seriously.

For instance, sometimes I mentioned that in recent years the number of Aboriginal children in our Catholic Education system has increased exponentially. Clearly, Aboriginal families are choosing our educational system to have a truly broad and

deep education of their children, which includes an ennobling of their Aboriginal background. This truly is an Acknowledgment of Country! Let us not allow familiarity to breed contempt in relation to our First Australians. A change of attitude that is genuine and a real conversion to our relations with them will hopefully change social and political structures in the long term.

A beautiful way that each one of us can make an Acknowledgment of Country is to seek out Aboriginal people in our own community, befriend them and get to know them. That truly would be a wonderful acknowledgment because it starts in the heart and then moves to the head, hands and feet. So let us keep the fires burning and let us be strong in faith with our first Australians by encouraging healthy attitudes and discourse to flourish.

In regard to our "Gospill" for today, since everything must begin in the heart, let us use this little expression frequently this coming week, "Set my heart right in your sight, O 'Lord."