

3 February 2019, 9.15 a.m. | 4th Sunday Year C

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19 | Psalm 71:1-6, 15-17 | 1 Corinthians 12:31–13:1-13 (1 Cor 13:4-13) | Luke 4:21-30

GOD BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Introduction

As we come to the Eucharist this morning, the Lord invites us to examine our attitude towards him, because we see in the gospel of today a great swing from admiration to hatred towards Jesus. Let us pray that our admiration, our esteem, our love for Jesus may always increase and never diminish.

Homily

In the gospel of today, we find this very interesting shift from admiration to almost total hatred and complete rejection of Jesus in verse twenty-two of chapter four in the gospel according to Luke. It begins by saying that **all** the people in the synagogue in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth spoke well of him. They admired him, they appreciated his preaching. A little later, in verse twenty-eight, the gospel says **all**—once again—the people in the synagogue were furious, they were in wrath. They were angry with Jesus. They not only had a bad feeling towards him but also wanted to act against him. So they took him to the crown of the hill on which the town was built with the intent to throw him down – in other words, to kill him. So strong was their rejection.

What is it that caused this shift? The gospel explains it. The first thing the people say after they heard Jesus preach is, ‘Isn’t this man the son of Joseph, a mere carpenter? How is it that he preaches so well?’ Something was not quite ok. He was too familiar for them. He was known to them because he had gone to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, and they knew his family, they knew his relatives, they knew his background, they knew his roots. And they were not ready to be filled with admiration for such an ordinary person. How could this man be so great? This was the first sign of their diminished admiration for Jesus.

Then Jesus goes on preaching. He seems to add fuel to the fire. He quotes from the Old Testament and gives the example of Elijah, who, instead of helping his own people during the time of famine, reaches out to a widow who was not an Israelite and not belonging to the same faith. There was a great famine that raged for three years and there were many widows who were suffering. Elijah did not reach out to the widows of Israel but to the widow of Zarephath, a Sidonian. Elijah seemed to have rejected his own people to help others, just like Jesus was helping people outside his hometown. The people said to Jesus, ‘You did so many good things in Capernaum. Why don’t you do the same for us in Nazareth?’ Jesus seemed to be rejecting his very own in favour of people from outside.

Then Jesus goes on to give a second example from the Old Testament, the example of the leper during the time of Elisha. Elisha did not help the lepers of Israel; they were neglected. Instead, he helped Naaman, a leper from a Syrian background – once again, a rejection of his own. Jesus seems to give both these examples to justify that he is doing good work outside, and not in Nazareth, probably because a prophet is not accepted in his own hometown. So he passes from complete admiration to complete rejection from the people.

How can people be so fickle and change from admiration to rejection so quickly? What is it that has disturbed them? They are disturbed because Jesus is preaching a different gospel that was not their usual way of thinking. They felt that the Israelites were privileged people who alone should get all the benefits from

God. They were to be the favoured people of God, no matter what happened. But Jesus seems to take a different attitude.

What do we conclude from this? The first thing we can conclude is that we can never control God. We can never control who God is and how God should act in our lives. The people wanted to control Jesus. They thought they could domesticate him. He belonged to them; he was of their village, of their little town of Nazareth, and so he should be favourable towards them. They wanted to get hold of him and control his actions. But Jesus is meant for the whole world. His ministry is also beyond his hometown. And so we cannot control Jesus.

Dear sisters and brothers, all of us like to control God – right from the time of Moses, when the people fashioned a god in the shape of a golden calf and worshipped it, thinking that they could control that god. But God is always beyond our control; he is transcendent. He is ordinary, from Nazareth, but he is also from beyond. So while we pray to God with familiarity, we should always be prepared to receive answers from him that may be different from our expectations of him. This is the first thing that we must learn for ourselves.

The second thing is that we should be able to see God working beyond the boundaries of our own categories, our own concepts, our own understanding of religion. Just imagine a situation wherein there are two families in the neighbourhood, each having a family member who is sick. Both families are praying. If the family from a different religion seems to receive a favour from God, it may be our tendency to complain and grumble. We may ask God how come he healed that person who is not Catholic, but not the member from our own family. Doesn't God love us more than others? God works beyond our boundaries.

Let us pray, first of all, that we can appreciate the working of God beyond our boundaries, beyond even the boundaries of our own faith. God **is** at work. We must be able to accept that fact because God is universal. He is for all. We also see an incident in the life of Jesus, when his family members and his mother go to meet him, and Jesus says: Who is my mother? Who are my relatives? Who are my family members? The ones who do the will of God. And the ones who do the will of God may not be always his blood relations.

God is at work beyond our boundaries. Let us recognise this; let us appreciate this; let us thank God for this. Just imagine – in our country, there are so many people who are not Christians. We are a small minority. If we can think that we can close up God for ourselves in our churches, in our faith concepts, then we are crippling God's action. Let us pray that we might be open enough to know that God acts in our lives, yes, but he also acts in the lives of people around us, beyond our boundaries, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As we say the Lord's Prayer, let us pray that we might be open to understand that God is always transcendent, beyond our categories, beyond our little minds, beyond our faith. God **is** at work in each one of us and in the world. We pray: Our Father...



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