

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 14<sup>TH</sup>. SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)  
Ezekiel 2: 2-5 Psalm 123 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10 Mark 6: 1-6

Dear Preachers:

Featured in our readings today are three prophets (Ezekiel, Paul and Jesus) who were rejected and scorned by their very own people for the message they brought. Ezekiel is among his own Jewish exiles, taken off by the Babylonians into captivity. Paul is defending himself and his ministry against those who doubt his authenticity, and he is suffering, "hardships, persecutions and constraints, for the sake of Christ." Jesus is with his own people, in "his native place, accompanied by his disciples." These prophetic voice are met by obstinate people. The message they bear has its origins in God. For example, Ezekiel tells us, "the spirit entered into me....." He may be among a defeated nation exiled in a strange land, but God has a message Ezekiel must deliver to the people. God is inspiring and confirming the prophet; as Ezekiel puts it, God "set me on my feet."

Jesus' own ministry begins in a similar way when, at his baptism, "he saw the sky rent in two and the Spirit descending on him like a dove" (Mark 1:10). Both Ezekiel and Jesus will ask people to hear the truth about themselves. Initially this will require them to face the false and evil choices they have made in their lives. Some truths are hard to hear and Ezekiel, Paul, Jesus and other prophets, most frequently meet opposition. Jesus accused his contemporaries of building beautiful shrines to the very prophets their ancestors had killed.

Most frequently, biblical prophets come from among the very people to whom they are sent to preach. In today's gospel passage, Jesus' town people highlight how well they knew him and how ordinary he seemed to them. He was a carpenter; they were neighbors to his relatives. They must have been wondering, how could the most High and Holy One speak through such an ordinary person? We could ask the same kinds of questions about the "ordinary things" we say and do every day. Is it possible that God could be using us to reach out to our own; in our own "native place?" Adults and even the elderly will recall things they heard in childhood from their parents that continue to guide them today in their thinking and the choices they make. "My mother always told me...." "I remember how kind my father was when...."

The same God, who spoke to the exiles in Babylon through Ezekiel, reaches out to

us in our own exile through these biblical stories. Where are we in exile?... No longer feeling "at home?" ...Uncomfortable with what is happening in our lives?... Experiencing sickness or infirmities that make us feel like a stranger in our own mind or body?... Having beliefs that cause us to be at odds with those closest to us?...Feeling out of synch with the culture's values and practices?... Longing for a home God has promised us?...Tired of new reports of war, genocide, disease, poverty, inequality and divisions? Believers listening to these scriptures today know that we are exiles. We are not yet in the place we will someday call "home." In that place we will be together with our God where things will finally have been set right. Even as we struggle in our small way to restore "rightness" to different people and situations, we know that we will see no end to what needs righting.

Ezekiel and Jesus were not outsiders. They were part of the very people they were sent to tell what was wrong and needed correcting. These prophets urged the people to make the necessary changes in their private and public worlds. But prophets are also sent to console the victims---those on the other side of the imbalanced scales of justice. To these, prophets offer words from the God of comfort and hope; someday things will be set right—forever. Someday people will live in peace and equity. To the overwhelmed, the prophets' voices say that God has noticed their plight and will do something to address the imbalance. To those in the position to right the balance, the prophets utter God's loving but urgent words and require change in both thinking and acting.

Jesus' neighbors didn't deny his wisdom and mighty deeds. They just couldn't see any further than what was concrete and obvious. They would not accept his message, for they couldn't acknowledge that he came from God. How could one of their own be speaking for God, bringing deliverance from sin, opening up an entirely new future? They may have been astonished at what they have seen and heard; but they were not going to change their lives. Had they put faith in Jesus' wisdom they would have heard God's guidance and encouragement. Had they looked deeper into Jesus' cures, they might have caught sight of God reaching out to rescue them. After Jesus died they may have put up a plaque at the entrance to Nazareth, "Jesus Christ was born and raised here." Maybe they would eventually name a town square or a gym after him—but they still would have missed God reaching out to them through this prophet who was "without honor in his native place."

Jesus' contemporaries had somehow been taught to live by skepticism, no longer

expecting God to act in their lives; holding God's way of doing things to standards they themselves had devised. Jesus certainly didn't look or sound like the messiah they were expecting. If we are waiting for God to speak to us in thunder and lightning displays, then we have a very long wait. If we are waiting for someone to lay out a precise road map for our future, telling us what good things we are to do and precisely what missteps we must avoid— then we may as well make ourselves comfortable right where we are. The wait for surety is going to be a very long one.

Yes, we are called to be prophets and yes, we are ordinary people. If we are going to be prophets in our "native place," then the One who sends us needs to confirm, instruct and feed us. And, of course, God does just that today. What we do at our liturgical celebration is to listen attentively to these scriptural passages, for in them, we hear a word through which the Spirit speaks to us in our exile, "sets" us on our feet and sends us to speak to those around us--- just as the Spirit did for Ezekiel, Paul and Jesus. We also need to look again at this bread and wine, such simple, ordinary gifts and believe that in them, we are being fed a prophet's food. For what? Well, for one thing, to strengthen our Christian living in whatever exile we find ourselves. Living in exile is such a displaced feeling, it is hard to remember our citizenship is not here in this place, but in God's place. The eucharist is our exile meal, it helps us stay focused and strong, keeps the memory and anticipation of our true home before our eyes and helps us live and speak as witnesses of that "home land."

#### ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER

Keith Pecklers, S.J. (Ed.) *Liturgy in a Post Modern World*. New York: Continuum, 2003. ISBN 0-8264-6412-2 (Paper, 215 pages)

Thirteen essays by noted liturgical theologians and preachers from around the world address issues of liturgical renewal during this post-modern (some would say, "post-Christian") time. What is the role and credibility of worship for the Christian community in a period of increasing individualism and narcissism? This is a serious study and provides an opportunity for those with liturgical training and interests to ponder the future of liturgy.

#### QUOTABLE

[A reason for the crisis of preaching today]

The poetic imagination is marginal within our dominant scientific culture. This tends towards a deadening literalism. In most traditional societies poetry, myth,

song and music were central to the culture. In our society these have often been reduced to entertainment. The hunger for the transcendent is still there in the human heart. As St. Augustine said, it is restless until it rests in God. But in our postmodern society it is harder for the preacher to evoke that ultimate human destiny which transcends our worlds. Few preachers are poets. I am not. But if the preaching of the word is to flourish, then we need poets and artists, singers and musicians who keep alive that intuition of our ultimate destiny. The Church needs these singers of the transcendent to nurture her life and her preaching.  
— Timothy Radcliffe, OP in, *Liturgy in a Post Modern World*, page 145.

### JUSTICE NOTES

[continued from last week----"Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration," from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States]

Both of our episcopal conferences have echoed the rich tradition of church teachings with regard to migration. Five principles emerge from such teachings, which guide the Church's view on migration issues.

1. Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.
2. All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.
3. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
4. The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people.
5. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.

### POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty."  
Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to:.....

Darrell Strickland #0393145 (On death row since 10/27/95)

- Jerry Dale Hill #0511057 (10/31/95)
- Keith B. East #0511998 (11/8/95)
- John D. Mc Neil #0275678 (11/10/95)

-----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

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