

Focusing the Gospel

Mark 6:1-6

Mark begins a new theme in his gospel with today’s reading that will be central to his story of Jesus: the obtuseness of people to the power and authority of Jesus. The people of Jesus’ own hometown reject his message. They consider Jesus too much “one of them” to be taken seriously. They are too obsessed with superficialities—occupation, ancestry, origins—to realize the presence of God in their midst and to allow themselves to be affected by that presence.

Jesus redefines the meaning of authority as understood by his kinfolk: Jesus’ authority is not derived from his ability to manipulate the fears, suspicions, apathy, or ignorance of those around him but from the spirit of mercy, justice, and compassion that he is able to call forth from them. The authority his hearers see in Jesus is rooted in wisdom that comes from experience and a lived commitment to act justly and selflessly.

Focusing the First Reading

Ezek 2:2-5

Ezekiel is called by God to speak his word to his own people: Judean Jews who have been repatriated from their beloved Jerusalem to Babylon. God warns the prophet that his work will be very difficult: God is sending him to speak to a defeated, distrusted people who feel abandoned by God and will be immediately hostile to anyone who claims to speak for the God they have “rebelled against.”

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 123:1-2, 2, 3-4 (2cd)

The master-slave relationship is the central image of Psalm 123. In ancient Near Eastern cultures, a master was responsible for providing for the slave; in return, the slave could be trusted for managing the property of the master. The psalmist seeks God (the master) to act on behalf of his servants (the slaves) who have been exiled and impoverished by their Babylonian captors.

Focusing the Second Reading

2 Cor 12:7-10

The Corinthian church had been divided by members allying themselves with other “apostles.” The splintering of the community at Corinth has been a source of great sorrow for Paul, who had reminded them that unity is to be had in Christ. In the final section of this series of Sunday readings from his two letters to the Corinthians, Paul reflects on some of his most difficult challenges: not to grow conceited, to discover strength in weakness, and to experience God’s grace in times of hardship.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

Who are the “authorities” in your life whom you look up to and pay attention to?

Have you ever known someone who possessed the courageous, unwavering faith of a “prophet”?

When have you been “offended” by someone who spoke about a moral or ethical issue?

In what situations or set of circumstances has it been most difficult for you to live your faith?



Model Penitential Act

Presider: Let us begin our celebration of the Eucharist by humbly placing our hearts before God, confident of his forgiveness for our sins and failings. [pause]

- You heal the brokenhearted: Lord, have mercy.
- You seek out and bring back the lost: Christ, have mercy.
- You grasp the stumbling and lift up the fallen: Lord, have mercy.

Homily Points

- In baptism, we are all called to the role of prophet—“one who proclaims” the presence of God in our midst. But such “prophecy” can be risky, terrifying, misinterpreted, threatening to others; to act and speak as a prophet can result in our being ostracized, ridiculed, rejected, and isolated. But faith of a true prophet never falters in the conviction that the justice of God will triumph over injustice, that God’s mercy will triumph over hatred, that God’s light will triumph over the darkness of sin and death.
- Authority is much more than rhetoric; it is the lived commitment of one’s beliefs. Authentic authority is not invested by virtue of office or title or economic power, but in the wisdom that comes from experience and a commitment to do what is right and just that transcends expectations. True authority does not evoke fear; it enables growth, inspires beauty, makes hopes and dreams possible. Such is the authority of the rabbi Jesus of the gospels. The source of Jesus’ authority is not the ability to manipulate his hearer’s suspicions, apathy, or ignorance but to call forth from them a commitment to mercy, justice, and compassion. Those who speak not to our emotions and wants but to our consciences, who speak not in catchy slogans and buzzwords but in the convictions of their experience, who share with us from the wealth of their own hard work possess the authority that is of God, an authority that is worthy of our respect and attentiveness.
- Like the people of Jesus’ hometown, we often fail to realize the presence of God in our very midst. When Jesus’ prophetic words become difficult to comprehend, when his Gospel threatens our own safe, insulated world, when Jesus challenges our own incomplete and myopic view of God, we walk away from him or reject him outright, as the people of Nazareth did. Jesus calls us—dares us—to change our perspective, our belief systems, and ourselves to bring God’s kingdom of peace and compassion to reality for all his sons and daughters. God dwells in our midst in the simplest acts of kindness, in the humblest efforts of compassion for others, in the singular attempts to secure the justice and peace of God in hidden and forgotten places.

Model Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)

Presider: Let us lift up our eyes and hands to the Lord in prayer.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

That the Spirit of God may “enter” the hearts of all who serve the church as pastors, teachers, counselors, and ministers, enabling them to proclaim God’s love for all his people . . .

That our president and the leaders of all nations, states, and cities may lead and govern with the authority born of wisdom and selflessness . . .

That the sick, the suffering, the addicted, and the dying may experience God’s grace in our compassion and care . . .

That we, as a church and parish community, may be prophets of the justice and mercy of God . . .

Presider: We come to you in hope, O Lord, knowing that you will hear the prayers we ask in faith. May your Spirit of wisdom and truth rest upon us always, so that we may be prophets of your great love. In Jesus’ name, we pray. **Amen.**

COLLECT

Let us pray

Pause for silent prayer

O God, who in the abasement of your Son have raised up a fallen world, fill your faithful with holy joy, for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin you bestow eternal gladness. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Ezek 2:2-5

As the LORD spoke to me, the spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard the one who was speaking say to me: Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have revolted against me to this very day. Hard of face and obstinate of heart are they to whom I am sending you. But you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord God! And whether they heed or resist—for they are a rebellious house—they shall know that a prophet has been among them.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 123:1-2, 2, 3-4

R. (2cd) Our eyes are fixed on the Lord,
pleading for his mercy.

To you I lift up my eyes
who are enthroned in heaven—
as the eyes of servants
are on the hands of their masters.

R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord,
pleading for his mercy.

As the eyes of a maid
are on the hands of her mistress,
so are our eyes on the LORD, our God,
till he have pity on us.

R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord,
pleading for his mercy.

Have pity on us, O LORD, have pity on us,
for we are more than sated with
contempt;

our souls are more than sated
with the mockery of the arrogant,
with the contempt of the proud.

R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord,
pleading for his mercy.

SECOND READING

2 Cor 12:7-10

Brothers and sisters:

That I, Paul, might not become too elated,
because of the abundance of the
revelations,
a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an
angel of Satan,
to beat me, to keep me from being too
elated.

Three times I begged the Lord about this,
that it might leave me,
but he said to me, “My grace is
sufficient for you,
for power is made perfect in weakness.”

I will rather boast most gladly of my
weaknesses,
in order that the power of Christ may
dwell with me.

Therefore, I am content with weaknesses,
insults,
hardships, persecutions, and
constraints,
for the sake of Christ;
for when I am weak, then I am strong.

About Liturgy

The view from the pew: A pastor sent out a survey to all his parish staff members to find out their perception of the quality of its liturgies. In general, most of the leaders—other priests, deacons, pastoral associates, and directors—ranked their liturgies fairly high. They saw their music as excellent in encouraging assembly participation. The preaching was above average and usually connected in a significant way to the lives of the parishioners. Their assemblies were welcoming communities where people felt like they mattered and they knew one another. The same survey was later sent to the parish leaders who served as volunteers for the many liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral ministries. These were the people you could count on every Sunday to sit in the front pews, be engaged in the Mass, and stay afterward to connect with friends and do other parish activities. They, too, like the staff members, tended to rank their parish’s Sunday liturgies, in general, good to excellent in all areas.

Finally, the survey was sent to anyone and everyone in the pews over the course of several Sundays, so you had a wide range of responses from longtime parishioners, newcomers, one-time visitors, and back-row Catholics. The results were markedly different. People said the music, in general, was good, but most of the time they just listened because they didn’t really know the songs or feel encouraged to sing. Most people couldn’t say how the homily connected to their lives, but they really enjoyed Father’s jokes. Lastly, many people said in general they felt welcomed, but other than their family or the friends they came with, no one else had a conversation with them that day at the parish or personally invited them to do something more beyond Mass.

Our point of view in the liturgy matters. If we’re regularly up in front, at a mic, or in a position of authority in the parish, we will see a whole different view of the Sunday Mass than the person who sits in the back row, who comes in late, leaves early, or is there only because of culture, obligation, or habit. Neither perspective is a complete or accurate assessment of the parish or of what the parish does on Sunday. But our responsibility as liturgical leaders is to try to break out of our familiarity and bias with our experience and to see our parish liturgy from the perspective of those who are most often left out in the decision-making and whose voices are never heard or solicited—the outsider, the visitor, the seeker, the immigrant, and the ones we label as uninterested or uncommitted.

About Liturgical Music

Seeing the assembly as the choir: A 1982 United States bishops’ document on liturgical music said, “The entire worshiping assembly exercises a ministry of music” (Liturgical Music Today, 63). Later in a 2007 document, the US bishops said, “The choir must not minimize the musical participation of the faithful. The congregation commonly sings unison melodies, which are more suitable for generally unrehearsed community singing. This is the primary song of the Liturgy” (Sing to the Lord, 28).

The assembly is the primary music minister, and their song is the primary song of the liturgy. The choir and other music ministers serve to support and enhance the song of the primary music makers.

One way choir members and music leaders can get a new perspective on how well they are doing in supporting the assembly’s song is simply by sitting among the assembly every so often. Summer is the perfect time to do so. Have choir members sit in the pews throughout the church instead of in the choir area, and have them listen for, support, and appreciate even more the sound of the assembly.