

The 4th Sunday of the Year (Feb. 2/3 2019)

What an amazing turn of events in the Gospel! Jesus comes back to the place of His birth, Nazareth, and they invite Him to preach in their synagogue. This was a special distinction. They had heard about all he had done in these other places, and now they expected He would do the same in His home place. Why, after all, "Charity begins at home." Right ?

Their first reaction to Him was extremely favorable. "All spoke highly of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His mouth." However, their admiration soon turned to doubt, then to hostility. What went so wrong ? How could all of this happen so quickly ? It all just sounds so strange. What do you see happening in this episode ?

It is certainly worthy of a closer look ! Because in reality it happens everyday. There is an expression, I don't know who the originator is, but it says :

"Religious people have Preferences,
Missionary People have Stories"

It is truly a marvelous reflection. And the truth is really borne out in this Gospel incident. The people of Jesus' home town of Nazareth were certainly religious, but to say that they were Missionary would be a stretch. They had their own minds on what He should be, and what He should do for them. They could not see or conceive of His Mission in the world !!! His mission was to be in service of them He was one of their own after all !!!!!!!!!!!

Truthfully, is that not the perspective of a lot of religion today. God is our God, and we are His Chosen ! A lot of what we have taught, and a lot of what we have come to expect. Not surprising then that a lot of religion today is disappointing.....because we have the same perspective that the people of His hometown had ! Some of that perspective is clear in our approach to prayer : We have learned from our earliest days that when you need something, you pray to God, and He will respond to you in your need ! Right ?

Now what happens when He doesn't respond ? Or, at least respond in the manner in which I have determined He should. Then, I have a real

crisis I begin to think..... He doesn't care, He doesn't love me, He is not for Real, He doesn't want what I want all of these things become very real in our thinking process.

Not surprising then that many abandon the idea of religion, and indeed the idea of relationship with God. That is all simply due to the fact that we had an incorrect notion of relationship with God to begin with. As we look carefully at the people of His hometown in today's Gospel, we find an extraordinary tale about Religion. — Religion which is devoid of Missionary Sense, is of no real value in the lives of people. If my religion does not support my understanding of my Mission in the world, what value does it really have ?

The largest and greatest aspect of Religion should be: What is the Mission? What are we about ? What are we supposed to be about ?

In today's Gospel, we may be left wondering : Why did they turn on Him in such an angry way ? Because of what He said ? ???? That was the first reason, perhaps. But, there was also a much deeper reasonIt was because He showed up the ugly things that lay hidden in them. And indeed, the ugly that lays hidden behind a lot of beliefs, and Religious practice. If you stir up a stagnant pond a lot of mud will rise to the top.....

Regrettably, religion sometimes brings out the worst in people (or it might be more correct to say that interpretation of religion sometimes brings out the worst in people). Rigid and strict adherence to religious beliefs and principles, can be very destructive. That is why I shared with you earlier the idea : RELIGIOUS PEOPLE HAVE PREFERENCES Religion and their understanding thereof, can make people narrower in their perspectives, more bigoted, and more apt to hate or kill.

God knows we see plenty of that in our world today. We see an example of it in the people of Nazareth. On hearing that the benefits which they had rejected, through their lack of faith in Jesus and His Mission, would be offered to the Gentiles, the people were outraged. As Jews, they were God's own Chosen People. These others were outsidersand sinners..... yes, sinners..... How dare He suggest that the Gentiles would be preferred to them? In an outburst of Nationalistic fervor they turned against Him. "They rose up, drove Him out of town, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built....."

Which one would have ultimately pushed Him over ?

I guess in their terror or anguish any one of them could have done so ! The Gospel episode today challenges a lot of our beliefs about Religion. Religion can so easily become distorted, and turn into such things as fanaticism, and bigotry, and rights, and theological arguments, and entitlement, and divine right. The practice of Religion can easily become the measure by which we so easily judge another, and yet we can fail to integrate the true practice within our own lives. Religion can easily become synonymous with narrow-mindedness, small-heartedness, and exclusivity. Who is in, and who is not in ? Certainly not what Jesus came to establish. Despite the limited view of the people of His Hometown ! No ! What Jesus came to establish on Earth was not a Religion, but A Mission A Mission of Faith in God, and Love of Him, and Love of Neighbor as Self.

We have a statement in the back of our church, these past five years or so, I am sure you have seen it many times :

“From Maintenance To Mission”

It is an extremely important declaration !

It is not sufficient for us to just maintain ourselves and our religious practices ! We are here to discover our Mission and how our Mission in the world fits into His Mission. ??????

What is our Mission ? Could you take time to put in some words what Our Mission is ? What it should be ? Would you be kind enough to forward those thoughts to me ?

Saint Paul in today's 2nd Reading beautifully summarizes all of this :
“So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is Love.”
In other words I could have Faith, I could have Hope, but if I do not Love What is the point and purpose of my life ?

—Fr. Gerry Hurley