

Epiphany 4 Year C (4 Ordinary Sunday)

Readings: Jeremiah 1:4-10, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Luke 4:21-30 Psalm 71:1-6

Theme: Call to Prophecy

"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from him."

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

My dear friends, on this 4th Sunday of Epiphany, we meditate on the call to proclaim the Word of God. The quotation above was from the people of Nazareth who commented after listening to Jesus preaching in the temple. They were impressed, but what did they make of him and his speech? How did they respond and what obstacles helped or prevented the people from internalising the words they heard?

We begin with the call to prophesy. The first reading from the book of Jeremiah narrates the call of Isaiah and his unwillingness to respond to that call because of what he regarded as his inadequacy. Part of the traditional pattern of the call of a prophet was reassurance by God (Exodus 13:11) Jeremiah like Isaiah's Servant (Isaiah 49:1) and Paul (Galatians 1:15), knew that his call went back to the time he was in the womb of his mother. Despite his youth, he need not hesitate to speak God's word before the most powerful in the land. He was not guaranteed success. He was still God's envoy even if his word was ignored. The psalm continues the theme of the first reading and it lays emphasis on the problem and cry of help from the messenger of God. It is a song of lament from one who has spent most of his time in the service of God without an apparent success. However God's steadfastness sustains him in times of need.

In the second reading, Paul writing to the Corinthian Christians contrasts love with other gifts sought eagerly in the church in Corinth. For him having these gifts mean nothing without love. You can be the best organiser, the best fundraiser, the best Preacher, all these mean nothing without love. He picks out two qualities that are characteristic of love its patience and kindness. He lists eight vices incompatible with it. Finally he lays emphasis on the permanence of love. It is part of fullness of Christianity. It will always exist. God will never be without it. John identifies God with it. Christ is its best personification. Its qualities are further listed in Paul's catalogue of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Galatians.

The Gospel is a continuation of last Sunday's reading. We see the reaction to Jesus teaching in the Synagogue at Nazareth. Jesus had just announced his programme with words from the prophet, Isaiah. He introduces it further by calling attention to two other prophets of Israel, Elijah and Elisha. These two had brought salvation to a widow (1 Kings 17:9) and a leper (2 Kings 5:1) - both were agents of God's mercy to foreigners. The people did not believe that the words of Isaiah could apply to him, the humble son of Joseph. On hearing that the benefits they have rejected will be offered to the Gentiles, the people rise up in fury and attempt to do away with Jesus. This foretells the ultimate faith of Jesus.

Why did they turn on him so angrily? Because of what he said; that was the first reason. But there was a deeper reason it was because he showed up the ugly things that lay hidden in them. If you stir up a stagnant pond, a lot of mud will rise to the surface.

Regrettably, religion sometimes brings out the worst in people. It makes them narrower, more bigoted, and more apt to hate and kill. We see an ugly example of this in the citizens of Nazareth. This kind of thing still happens. Religion can be distorted and turn into something repulsive such as fanaticism and bigotry. Religion can also bring out the best in people. Response to disasters all over the world is a good example. It makes people more tolerant and more loving. True religion liberates the heart and mind and fosters harmonious relationship with others. Religion is beautiful if it is like this. The question each of us must ask is: What does religion bring out in me?

There is an essential link between faith and love. St Paul said that there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love. The level of our faith can be measured by the quality of our love. Today, a lot of people are cynical about the existence of real love. They are sceptical about the existence of goodness unsullied by self-interest. Paul was aware of the mixed motions behind what people do. He understood how people could make great sacrifices, yet those sacrifices are worthless because they are done from motives of self-interest. But still he believed in the possibility of love, and that is central to the Christian life.

As we continue our journey of life, let us reflect on idea of love and the reflection in our lives. Let us reflect on these.

In the Name of the Father; and of the Son; and of the Holy Spirit: **Amen.**