

This week's Gospel reading continues where last week's Gospel left off. Let's recall that in last week's Gospel, Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah and He announced that this Scripture was now fulfilled. In today's Gospel, we learn that the people of Nazareth are amazed by Jesus' words, and they seem surprised. But they question his authority and training: "Isn't this the son of Joseph, the carpenter." They simply did not expect such words from someone they knew, and who they believed to be one of them.

So this Gospel today is about who Jesus is and who the Jewish people of His town believed him to be. This story of Jesus' preaching and eventual rejection at Nazareth is also found in each of the other Synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Mark. In Luke's Gospel, he identifies the content of Jesus' teaching in detail, telling us that Jesus first read from the book of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth. In Matthew and Mark's Gospels, it only tells of Jesus teaching in the synagogue, and that the townspeople then take offense, because they know that Jesus is only the son of a carpenter, and so they simply reject his authority to teach them.

But in Luke's Gospel, the people seem to be surprised at first, and are not immediately offended by Jesus' words in the synagogue. But it's the words that we hear in today's Gospel that follow his reading from the prophet Isaiah that offend his listeners. It's because Jesus challenges them and provokes them by referring to examples in which the people of Israel rejected the earlier prophets. He turns their attention to two places in scripture in which non-Jews were on the receiving end of God's goodness: first, God (through the prophet Elijah) providing for a widow from Sidon and healing her son, and then God (through the prophet Elisha) cleansing the leper Naaman, a Syrian. Not only does Jesus mention these two instances from Scripture, he also points out, at the very same time, that there were many Jews in need of help, who didn't receive any.

And the people he was speaking to became furious, even going so far as to attempt to throw Jesus over the cliff at the edge of town. Jesus had really touched a nerve. Weren't they the "Chosen People"? The implication of Jesus' comments was that God didn't give the Jewish people any preferential treatment. And instead, Jesus is speaking about a God who desires to bless all people, and who wants good things for all people. This also implies that God didn't make the Jews the "Chosen People" because he loved them more. This "choice" by God was a privilege and blessing to them, but it did not mean that they were any better than others, or more entitled, or more worthy of God's love. And this revelation to the townspeople of Nazareth by Jesus was more than his hearers could bear.

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We are also asked to accept the truth of what Jesus is saying and take it to heart, because these are the necessary steps in our journey of trying to live the Christian life. Do we really believe that God loves each and every person the same, as He shares in this Gospel? If we want to get rid of our own jealousy toward others, we will have to do more than simply believe that God loves us - all the same. We also have to be okay with it, we need to be okay with a God who loves indiscriminately, and who send His blessings all over the world to everyone who needs them. Once we become okay with our God loving everyone the same, everything changes for us, and the way we act in the world changes, and the way we act in our individual relationships also changes. It becomes a new world.

That's why today's second reading seems so appropriate. St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians has so much to teach us about love. It helps us understand God's Love as something very concrete. "Love is patient, Love is kind, Love is not jealous or pompous, it is not inflated or rude, it does not seek it's own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury or rejoice over wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

St. Paul is telling the Corinthians that "love builds us up" and it's a binding force in their community. He concludes his letter to them with this request: "Be on guard, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong. Your every act should be done with "love".

So we need to really listen to these readings, and try to understand them with an open heart and mind. And the Lord will guide us and teach us. The Holy Spirit will instruct us in all of these things and help us discern how to respond to them in our lives.

But the one thing we don't want to do is to push Jesus to the edge of the cliff. Because Jesus' teaching will help to console us, for it is a gospel of love and mercy and peace. It is also a gospel which says "come, follow me," and a gospel which calls for a conversion of our hearts, and a change in the way we live. Can we do that?