

Homily: 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B) 2021

As you all know very well, I'm not usually shy about talking in public! I'm blessed in that, these days at least, I very rarely get nervous even in front of a large crowd of people, if only crowds were still to be found in these strange times. But on the occasions where I've had to preach at a Mass where many of my family were present, it's a bit different. And when I had to preach for the first time in front of my fellow students at the seminary, or even now when I have to preach to my brother priests, it can be a bit of a nerve-racking experience. I think most priests probably experience this – the feeling that somehow I will be received differently by people who know me really well.

That was certainly our Lord's experience at Nazareth. In the Gospel so far, Jesus has worked many miracles, taught vast crowds and swept aside opposition from the scribes and pharisees. But here, in the tiny village of Nazareth, they reject Him. He can work no miracle there, we are told, because of their lack of faith. The people speak of Him: "this is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary?" and they ask the question: "Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted Him, or these miracles that are worked through Him?" The truth is simple: He hasn't "got" it from anywhere: it is His, because He is God. Wisdom has not been granted Him – He Himself *is* divine Wisdom, the incarnate Word of God. And miracles are not worked *through* Him, but *by* Him – the authority and the power is His own.

Perhaps the people reject Him because they know Him, or think they know Him, too well. He is, it seems, just "the carpenter" – little do they know that He is actually the divine artist through whom and for whom everything was made. Since they feel so familiar with Him, they reject Him – familiarity breeds contempt, as the saying goes. There is a danger here for every Christian too: over time, we can become 'familiar' with Jesus. We can lose sight of the constant newness of His teaching, the grace that He offers us, His surprising presence in the sacraments. Yesterday when some children of our parish made their first Holy Communion, each and every one of them came forward devoutly and lovingly to receive our Lord. But what about us, when we make our thousandth or even ten thousandth communion? Do we still approach the Lord with that same care? Or do we in some way echo the people of Nazareth: "this is just the carpenter, surely?" And when we hear the Gospel, do we think, "I've heard this before – this is all very familiar"? Or do we listen with fresh minds and hearts? Today's Gospel reminds us never to forget that Jesus always comes to us anew. There is always more to hear, to discover, to experience, to receive from Him. But when this faith and this wonder dry up and we feel we've had everything He has to offer, then His miracles stop happening for us, because we are no longer open to His grace.

Perhaps there's another reason why the people rejected Jesus. Nazareth was a small and very insignificant village. It's not even mentioned in the Old Testament. When the Apostle Philip told Nathaniel that he had found the Messiah, who came from Nazareth, Nathaniel answered: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from that place?" And maybe the people of the town thought the same. "No miracle worker comes from our town", they presumed. "No prophet ever grew up in Nazareth." So, convinced of their own unimportance, they

dismissed the idea that a prophet, let alone the Son of God, could have made His home among them.

Here there is another lesson for us. Many of us, aware of our own flaws, our imperfect faith, our apparent lack of progress in the spiritual life, are tempted to think that Jesus would not choose to make His home in us. But He does. In St John's Gospel, He says this: "Make your home in me, as I make mine in you." Every Christian heart is called to be a Nazareth: poor, insignificant perhaps, unappealing and flawed, and yet a dwelling place of the Son of God. Jesus wants us to have faith to believe that He makes us Temples of His dwelling. We become His home. Will we accept this prophet, this Saviour, in His own country? Or will we presume that anyone who dwells in me can't really be all that great? Let's not make our own judgment, but let's trust Him. He chose Nazareth: humble, insignificant, ridiculed little Nazareth, and made His home there. Let's trust that He makes each of our hearts a new Nazareth where His preaching can be heard and His miracles be worked, if only we receive Him, ever anew, with faith.

Fr Andrew

