

Gospel – Mark 6:1-6

Jesus departed from there and came to his native place,
accompanied by his disciples.

When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue,
and many who heard him were astonished.

They said, “Where did this man get all this?

What kind of wisdom has been given him?

What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands!

Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary,

and the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon?

And are not his sisters here with us?”

And they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them,

“A prophet is not without honor except in his native place
and among his own kin and in his own house.”

So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there,

apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them.

He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Gospel Study – *Look at the World with New Eyes*

In our Gospel from Mark Ch. 6, Jesus moves from where he centered his public ministry—the town of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee—and goes back to his hometown of Nazareth where Mary had grown up. It's in that town of Nazareth where he comes back as the hometown boy made good. You can hear the shift in the lines that Mark records; the dialogue among the people in the town. It starts out with astonishment at the wisdom of his words. Awe at the power of the stories that they've heard about him; the miracles at his hands. But that astonishment and awe soon diminishes into resentment and questioning.

Who is he? Who does he think he is? We know him. We know where he came from. We saw him grow up. We saw Mary change his diapers. We saw Joseph teach him how to play baseball. We remember when he learned his ABCs. The result is, they boxed him in and judged him. Was it jealousy within their own hearts or was it just that narrow confinement where we judge each other and we say, "I think I know you?" We put each other in a box.

Acts of faith, the miracles that flow from Jesus' hand, are an interactive activity. Think of how often after a miracle Jesus will turn to that person and say, "Your faith has saved you." There are so many examples of that in the Scripture. Those miracles of God's grace are not simply (most of the time) Jesus' power coming to the other person, it's an interactive activity. There's faith on the part of the recipient and there's power that flows forth from Jesus. It goes back and forth.

Today's Scripture ends with Mark recounting that Jesus could not perform many mighty deeds there, except for a few minor miraculous healings, because of the lack of faith on the part of the people in his own home town. What does that have to say to us? How do we look at the people around us: the people within our own parish, the people within our own neighborhood, the

people that we work with day in and day out, the people in our own family; our own children, our parents, our spouses?

There is a great danger when we live with somebody and we've seen them for many years to say, "I know them. I know them like a book. I know what they're going to do. I know what their thoughts are." And many times, sadly, that's true, but it doesn't leave any room for the grace of the Holy Spirit. When people go away on a retreat experience and they come back renewed, it's often very difficult for their spouse. They simply dismiss the experience. I've heard many stories about that. Where people come and they're fired up and then they go back home and that enthusiasm is dampened because their family just says, "Well, you're just you."

Or a kid can go away and they can have a wonderful experience and they come back and are met by rejection from their family because their family wants to put them in the same old box. Or somebody who's been struggling with addiction for a long time in their life and they finally decide, "I'm going to get sober. I'm going to break with the drugs. I'm going to change." But the family won't cut them any slack, they just say, "We know who you are." There are these family systems and everybody has their role and when one person changes it changes the whole system and that is resisted.

If we commonly hear these words day after day, week after week, year after year, we have to come with an openness of mind and heart to say the Lord wants to change us. He isn't through with us and he isn't through with those around us. He isn't through with our church. He isn't through with our country. He isn't through with our world.

Our God is a God of surprises. God is a God of openness to change. Today we celebrate the feast of St. John Bosco, a Saint who looked at the world with new eyes. He lived from 1815 to 1888 in Italy. One of the big problems in that society were street children. You might call them "white trash." That's how other people looked at those people around them. They said: "They're good for nothing. They're uneducated. They're dirty. They're vulgar." The solution of that society was to lock them up and throw them in jail; just give up on them. "They're deadbeats. They aren't going to amount to anything." Sadly, those expectations were fulfilled. When you treat people like trash and you say they're good for nothing then, surprise, surprise, they fulfill those expectations. They continued their way of crime and their vulgarity and they fulfilled those expectations.

John Bosco looked with different eyes on those children. He said, "We don't need to treat them with blows, we need to treat them with kindness and gentleness and love. They need to be educated. They need to be wanted. They need to be loved." So, he reached out to the children in that society and they flocked to him like a Pied Piper and astonishing things began to happen. Those children began to change because they were wanted; because they were loved.

Was that resisted by the authorities? Yes, because it didn't make them look good. Suddenly his social program was attracting these children and they were changing and rather than celebrating the change they resisted it. They looked for a few examples of kids that weren't changing and they'd say, "See! See! I told you so. I told you so." But what about the 99 that were changing? "Well let's just ignore them. Look at these examples."

Was it resisted by the Church? You bet it was resisted by the Church, because it was unconventional. The priests of his time, when he tried to use some of the space within the seminary, they said, "You're disturbing our prayer! We're supposed to be quiet here. We're working on serious homilies to educate the people and you've got these ruffians out here playing ball and you're doing magic tricks and you're teaching them to juggle and to read. They're disturbing our quiet contemplation. Get them out of here, this is a retreat house for God sakes."

Even the Bishop looked at John Bosco and said you're too big for your britches. Who do you think you are? But he persisted in love and he was humbler yet. What was a result of his work? He founded a new religious order, the Salesians, taking their name after St. Francis de Sales and among the ranks of those poor children, the white trash that he didn't give up on, were future bishops. He taught them not only with their heads but with their hands. He taught them crafts. There were future bishops, future religious, future Saints.

One of the gifts that St. John Bosco used to educate the kids was juggling. He was a juggler and now St. John Bosco is the Patron Saint of jugglers. John Bosco taught us that we need to begin by believing in ourselves; that God wants to do great things in us; that God has created each of us in the image and likeness of God. Sometimes we drop the ball. We give up on ourselves because we make mistakes. It's very hard to exercise what I call "the humility joint" and to say, "Lord, I messed up. I screwed up, but in your holy name I forgive myself. In your name Lord, help me not to give up on myself." John Bosco taught those children not to give up on themselves and that each one of them is a unique creation made in the image and likeness of God.

[WHILE TOSSING A BALL TO SOMEONE] John Bosco taught them to believe in each other; that faith is an interactive activity. We catch faith from one another. [AFTER DELIBERATELY THROWING THE BALL SHORT] Now sometimes is the pitch low and inside and does it get dropped? Yes, but rather than just judging the other person and saying, "You dropped the ball," not recognizing that our pitch was low and inside, we exercise the humility joint, we bend down, we pick it up and we enter into this game of life; this game of faith that has everything to do with who we are and why we are here.

[TOSSING A BALL HIGH IN THE AIR] Of course, there's a third person in the struggle and it's the one who made us. It's the one who puts color in our life. It's the one who never gives up on us. It's our Lord, it's our Redeemer. It's believing that God wants to and can work great things within our life. What our Gospel today, I believe, teaches us, is how to juggle. It teaches us not to give up on ourselves; not to give up on others; never to give up on God. We don't do any one of those activities by itself.

[EARNESTLY JUGGLING THREE BALLS] It's believing in God..believing in others...believing in ourselves. It's believing in God...believing in others...believing in ourselves...You can applaud anytime you want...

We're not applauding for me, we're applauding for God's grace; this holy Trinity of God's grace at work within ourselves, within others, within our world. Amen. (Amen.)