

## **Daily Reflections: Sept 1 – 6, 2014**

**Sept 1-6: Sept 1 Monday: Lk 4: 16-30: Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth: The context:** Today's Gospel presents his own people's reaction to Jesus' "Inaugural Address" at a synagogue in Nazareth when he visited his home town as a rabbi with a band of disciples. The reading shows us how Jesus faced skepticism and criticism with prophetic courage. The incident reminds us that we should have and show the courage of our Christian convictions daily as we live in our communities, especially when we face hatred and rejection because of our Christian faith and its practice.

**Amazement turns to hatred.** The first reaction of the people in the synagogue to Jesus' words was one of astonishment. They were amazed that one of their fellow-villagers could speak with such grace, eloquence and authority. But their amazement turned into displeasure when Jesus took upon himself the identity of a prophet, different from the image of the miracle-worker that people wished to see. Their displeasure turned into anger, then hatred, when Jesus claimed that he was the Messiah of Isaiah's prophecy. They challenged his Messianic claim, asking, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" They could not understand how a mere carpenter from Nazareth could be the *Messiah* who would liberate them from Roman rule and reestablish the Davidic kingdom. Jesus explained their attitude by saying, "No prophet is accepted in his native place."

**Jesus' reaction to His people's skepticism:** Jesus reacted to their negative attitude with the comment, "No prophet is accepted in his native place." Next, he referred to the Biblical stories of how God had blessed two Gentiles, while rejecting the many Jews in similar situations, precisely because those Gentiles were more open to the prophets than the Jewish people. Jesus reminded them of the Gentile widow of Zarephath, in Lebanon (1 Kings 17:7-24). The Prophet Elijah stayed with her and her son during the three-and-a-half-year drought, fed them miraculously and raised her son from death. Then Jesus described how Naaman, the pagan military general of Syria, was healed of leprosy by Elisha the prophet.

**Life messages:** 1) We need to face rejection with prophetic courage and optimism when we experience the pain of rejection, betrayal, abandonment, violated trust, neglect or abuse from our friends, families, or childhood companions. 2) Let us not, like the people in Jesus' hometown, reject God in our lives. Are we unwilling to be helped by God, or by others? Does our pride prevent us from recognizing God's direction, help and support in our lives through His words in the Bible, through the teachings of the Church and through the advice and examples of others? 3) We must have the prophetic courage of our convictions. This passage challenges us to have the courage of our Christian convictions in our day-to-day lives in our communities, when we face hatred and rejection because of our Christian faith.

**Sept 2 Tuesday: Lk 4: 31-37:** 31 *And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath; 32 and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word was with authority. 33 And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon; and he cried out with a loud voice, 34 "Ah! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." 35 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. 36 And they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." 37 And reports of him went out into every place in the surrounding region.*

**The context:** After his sad experience at his former home, Nazareth, Jesus made his headquarters the city of Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the center of the fishing business. There he started his preaching and healing ministry. The people were impressed by the authority with which he taught. The Old Testament prophets had taught using God's delegated authority, and the Scribes and

Pharisees taught quoting Moses, the prophets and the great rabbis. But Jesus taught using his own authority and knowledge as God. Perfect knowledge of God, perfect accomplishment of God's will, and absolute confidence in God were the sources of Jesus' authority.

The second part of today's Gospel describes a healing by exorcism which Jesus performed in the synagogue. We are told how Jesus, using his authority as God, cast out the devil by just one command: "*Be silent, and come out of him!*" The demon obeyed at once, throwing the man it had possessed to the floor in the midst of the people in the synagogue on its departure. The people were impressed with His power and authority that could command even evil spirits.

**Life messages:** 1) Our Faith is based on the divinity of Christ, proved by his miracles which in turn give authority and validity to his teaching. Hence, let us accept Jesus' teachings, even if some of them are mysteries beyond our understanding 2) Let us read the authoritative word of God every day and assimilate it into our lives. 3) In our illnesses, let us confidently approach Jesus the healer with trusting faith first, then go to the doctors who are instruments of Jesus' healing ministry in our midst.

**Sept 3 Wednesday: Lk 4: 38-44:** *38 And he arose and left the synagogue, and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they besought him for her. 39 And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her; and immediately she rose and served them. 40 Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. 41 And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them, and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. 42 And when it was day he departed and went into a lonely place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them; 43 but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose." 44 And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.*

**The context:** Today's Gospel tells us that preaching the good news of God's love, mercy and salvation, and healing the sick were the means Jesus used to build up the kingdom of God. By preaching and healing, He drew his listeners to belief in a loving and providing God and to loving obedience to His will. We are told that Jesus recharged his spiritual batteries every day by talking with and listening to his Heavenly Father, often in a desolate place at night.

**Healing mission:** Jesus never tired of healing the sick, thus demonstrating the mercy and compassion of His heavenly Father to every sick person who approached him with trusting faith. As soon as he had finished the day's preaching in the synagogue on one Sabbath, Jesus went to Simon's home and healed his mother-in-law of a fever. In the evening, when the Sabbath rest was over, people brought all their sick dear ones to Jesus for healing and exorcism. Jesus concluded each day by spending time in prayer in a lonely place.

**Life messages:** 1) We are called to continue Jesus' preaching mission primarily by bearing witness to Christ through our day-to-day lives, as we radiate Christ's mercy, love, forgiveness and spirit of humble service to all around us. 2) We can participate in Jesus' healing mission by praying for the sick and by visiting, helping and encouraging the sick and shut-ins. 3) We, too, need to have our spiritual batteries recharged every day as Jesus did, by prayer.

**Sept 4 Thursday: Lk 5: 1-11:** *1 While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. 2 And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, 7 they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at*

*Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." 9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.*

**The context:** The scene is the Sea of Galilee (*Gennesaret* in Greek and *Tiberius* in Latin). The story of the miraculous catch of fish described in today's Gospel is similar to the post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus recounted in John 21: 4-14. It is one of the "epiphany-call stories," which direct our attention to the fact that Jesus had his own criteria for selecting people to be his apostles. The reading challenges us to examine our own personal calls to conversion and discipleship.

**The miraculous catch followed by the call:** After teaching the crowd from a seat in the boat of Simon, Jesus said to him "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." Simon and his companions were stunned by the biggest catch of their lives. This event led Simon to acknowledge his unworthiness, as a sinner, even to stand before the divine presence of Jesus. Jesus was so impressed by Simon's obedience and confession of unworthiness that he immediately invited Simon, Andrew, James and John to be his disciples and so to "catch men" instead of fish.

**Life Messages:** 1) Our encounter with the holiness of God needs to lead us to recognize our sinfulness. The good news of today's Gospel is that our sinfulness -- our pride and self-centeredness -- does not repel God. That is why we offer this Mass asking God's pardon and forgiveness, and receive Holy Communion after acknowledging our unworthiness. 2) With Jesus, the seemingly impossible becomes possible. Today's Gospel passage tells us an important truth about how God works in and through us for His glory. God chooses ordinary people -- people like you and me -- as His ambassadors. He uses the ordinary circumstances of our daily lives and our responses.

**Sept 5 Friday: Lk 5: 33-39:** *33 And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees do the same; but yours eat and drink." 34 Jesus answered them, "Can you make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? 35 But the days will come, and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days." 36 And he also told them a parable. "No one tears a piece from a new cloak to patch an old one. Otherwise, he will tear the new and the piece from it will not match the old cloak. 37 Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be ruined. 38 Rather, new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins. 39 (And) no one who has been drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'*

**The context:** Today's Gospel passage gives Jesus' reply to the question asked by a few disciples of John the Baptist about fasting and feasting. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving were three cardinal works of Jewish religious life. Hence, John's disciples wanted to know why they and the Pharisees fasted while Jesus' disciples were seen feasting with him and never fasting.

**Jesus' reply:** Jesus responded to their sincere question using three metaphors: the metaphor of the "children of the bridal chamber," the metaphor of patching torn cloth and the metaphor of wineskins. First, Jesus compared his disciples with the children of the bridal chamber, the selected friends of the bride and groom who feasted in the company of bride and groom during a week of honeymoon. Nobody expected them to fast. Jesus explained that his disciples would fast when he, the bridegroom, was taken away from them. In the same way, we are to welcome both the joys of Christian life and the crosses it offers us. Using the comparisons of the danger of using new, unshrunk cloth to make a patch for an old garment and of using old wineskins to store freshly fermented wine, Jesus told the questioners that they must have more elastic and open minds and larger hearts to understand and follow his new ideas which were in many cases different from the traditional Jewish teachings.

**Life messages:** 1) We need to be adjustable Christians with open and elastic minds: The Holy Spirit, working actively in the Church and guiding the teaching authority in the Church, enables the Church to have new visions, new ideas and new adaptations and to replace old ways of worship with new. So we should have the generosity and good will to follow the teachings of the Church. 2) At the same time we need the Old Testament revelations, the New Testament teachings and the Sacred Tradition of the Church as main sources of our Christian faith.

**Sept 6 Saturday: Luke 6: 1-5:** *1 While he was going through a field of grain on a Sabbath, his disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating them. Some Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Have you not read what David did when he and those (who were) with him were hungry? (How) he went into the house of God, took the bread of offering, which only the priests could lawfully eat, ate of it, and shared it with his companions." Then he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."*

**The context:** Today's Gospel passage gives Jesus' teaching on the purpose of the Sabbath and on its proper observance. This was his response to a criticism and a silly accusation made by some Pharisees against his disciples who, to satisfy their hunger on a Sabbath, had plucked ears of grain from a field and removed the husks by rubbing the grain between their palms and blowing away the chaff. The Pharisees accused them of violating Sabbath laws by performing three items of work forbidden on Sabbath, namely, harvesting, threshing and winnowing.

**Counter-arguments:** Jesus gives three counter-arguments from Holy Scripture defending his apostles. (1) Basic human needs, like hunger, take precedence over divine worship and Sabbath observance. Jesus cites from Scripture the example of the hungry David and his selected soldiers. They approached Abimelech, the priest of Nob, who gave them for food the "offering bread" which only the priests were allowed to eat (Samuel 21: 1-6). (2) No law can stand against Divine worship. That is why the priests are not considered as violating Sabbath laws although they do the work of preparing two rams for sacrifice in the Temple (Numbers 28: 9-10). (3) Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea to remind the accusers of God's words: "I want mercy, not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6). Jesus further augments his counter-arguments by referring to himself as Son of Man, a Messianic title, and declares that He holds Lordship over the Sabbath itself.

**Life messages:** Like the Jewish Sabbath, the Christian Sunday is to be 1) a day of rest and refreshment with members of the family; 2) a day for thanksgiving and the recharging of spiritual batteries, through participation in the Eucharistic celebration (for Catholics); 3) a day for parents to teach religious faith and the Bible to their children; 4) a day to do works of charity in the neighborhood and in the parish and 5) a day for socializing with family members, neighbors and fellow-parishioners.