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Jesus' Homecoming

by: Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio



Over the last two Sundays, the gospel of Mark has been making it abundantly clear that Jesus is indeed God Almighty, ruler of the world and Lord over life and death.

But this week we come to a story that leaves us scratching our heads. Jesus goes to His own native place, and receives less than a jubilant reception. "They found Him too much for them." That may not be so surprising to those of us accustomed to family life. But what does come as a shock are these words: "He could work no miracle there . . . so much did their lack of faith distress Him."

Wait a minute. I thought that Jesus was God and therefore omnipotent. Wouldn't it be admitting that He is not God to say that he was unable to work miracles in a given place?

Hardly. God's exercises His power only in a way befitting His nature. God is a lover, not a rapist. He seeks to give His love to those who freely accept it and open their hearts to Him. He refuses to violate the wishes of those whom He has created in His image and likeness, who possess intellect and free will. He directly controls the wind and the waves through a word of simple command, for wind and waves are inanimate forces. But with regards to human beings, He makes Himself available and waits for an invitation. That invitation whereby we ask Him to come into our lives and calm our interior storms is called faith.



Faith is not, therefore, an emotion. It is not about an inner assurance, a feeling of confidence that is free of all shadow of doubt or fear. It is rather a decision, sometimes made with knees knocking. It is a yes that gives God permission to work in our lives and rearrange the furniture if He so chooses. That means blessing, healing, salvation and miracles. But it also means yielding to His will, His plan, His timetable. And of course, that is the part we don't like.

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What will others think of me? Will I still be able to spend Saturday nights the way I've always spent them? I work hard for a living and deserve to be able to blow off some steam! Will I still be able to hang out with Joe, to live with Mary?

Sometimes we are not really happy with the way things are, but at least they are familiar. We know what to expect. We are in control, or at least we think we are. Faith means handing over control, and that scares us. We are free to say no, and quite frankly we often do. Sometimes we say no in small ways—we only let God take us so far. Sometimes it's a very firm "no", that shuts God completely out of our lives.

This is the sort of no that Jesus encountered during His visit to Nazareth, and which the prophets before Him often encountered from the people of Israel.



So if Jesus was divine and therefore all-knowing, why did He bother to go to Nazareth at all? For the same reason that God sent Ezekiel to the Israelites and told him in advance that they'd resist. The Lord wanted to take away all excuses. God loved His people enough to offer them every opportunity for the healing and deliverance that they prayed for. He called their bluff, so to speak. Jerusalem pleaded for deliverance from the Babylonians and the people of Nazareth probably prayed for healing for Uncle Jacob or food for the town orphans. But in both cases when God showed up, ready to pour out his gifts, they didn't like the packaging and rejected the terms.

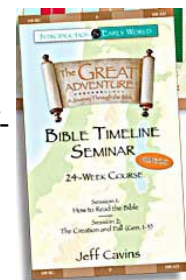
At the last judgment, when our lives flash before our eyes, we'll be reminded of the times God made a house call and we've slammed the door in His face. I say it's time to apologize, unbolt the door, and roll out the red carpet.

This was originally published in the July 9, 2006 edition of Our Sunday Visitor as a reflection upon the readings for the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, liturgical cycle B (Ez 2:2-5; Ps 123; 2 Cor 12:7-10; Mk 6:1-6). It is reproduced here with the permission of the author.

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