

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Ez 2:2-5; Ps 123:1-2,2,3-4; 2 Cor 12:7-10; Mk 6:1-6

THE PEOPLE TOOK OFFENSE AT HIM

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Saturday, July 7, 2018, 5:00 p.m. Mass

Sunday, July 8, 2018, 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. Masses

A lot of people, when they come to **church**, when they attend **Mass**, they would like it to be a “**feel good**” experience.

People want Mass to be **happy** and **friendly**, **warm** and **hospitable**, **uplifting** and **encouraging**.

I wonder if **Jesus** wants **Mass** to be that **comfortable**.

Jesus has a special **saying**, a **stand-alone beatitude**,
“**Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me**” (Mt 11:6).

His saying, sadly, connects with today’s gospel.

When **Jesus** went to **Nazareth**,
and when **Jesus** **preached** in the **synagogue** there,
the **people** from Nazareth,
“**They took offense at him**” (Mk 6:3b).

Jesus also said,

“**No prophet** is **without honor** except in his **native place**” (Mk 6:4).

When **Jesus** mentioned a prophet,
he was **referring to himself**.

Jesus **considered himself** to be a **prophet**,
and he **spoke like a prophet** in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Prophets call people to **greater holiness**,
to **stop** their **sinning** and to live a **better life**.

It would have been wonderful if the people had taken no offense at Jesus,
but the **people of Nazareth** **took great offense** at him.

St. Luke, in his version of this story, says,
“they were filled with **fury**” (Lk 4:28b).

The people were **outraged** by what Jesus said.

The people were filled with **anger** and **hatred for Jesus**.

Imagine, if you will, **people**,
screaming from their pews, **interrupting** Jesus,
“You’re crazy! Sit down! Get out of here!
We don’t need to listen to you!
You have no right to speak to us like this!”

St. **Mark**, in this gospel, **stops short** of what happened next.

St. **Luke** gives us the full, unedited, **confrontational version**.

As Jesus was speaking,
it was like a **riot** was breaking out.
It was **bedlam, mayhem**.

The people in the congregation **attacked** the **pulpit**.
St. Luke says, “They **rose up**, [and] **drove him out** of town” (Lk 4:29a).
They left their seats, **rushed** the pulpit,
grabbed ahold of Jesus, and **hauled him out** of the church.
That **synagogue** was a **nasty place**.

But the people were **not content** just **dump Jesus** out on the **street**.
“They **led him** to the **brow of the hill** upon which their town had been built” (Lk 4:29b).
It says, “**led**,” but it means “**dragged**.”
It was a **protest** against Jesus down the city street,
maybe four, five, or six blocks.
It says, “the **brow of the hill**.”
I’ve been to **Nazareth** multiple times myself.
The city is built up on a **plateau**.
It’s **elevation** is **1,150 feet**.
At the edge of town there is a **cliff** that drops to the **Jezreel Valley below**,
which is slightly **above sea level**.
I have stood there.
The **drop** is roughly **1000 feet**.
My **acrophobia** began to **kick in**.
St. Luke says that they intended “to **hurl him down headlong**” (Lk 4:29c).
The **people** were so **furious** that they were going to **throw Jesus to his death**,
but his **hour** had **not yet come** (see Jn 2:4; 7:30; 8:20) and somehow he **escaped** (see Lk 4:30).

So **what did Jesus say** that made them so **mad**?
Why did they **take such offense** at him?

The **gospel does not say**,
but it is really not that hard to figure out.

Remember, **Jesus** is a **prophet**, and he **called** the people **to holiness**.
It is **not** an **easy** task, and it is not fun.

When **Jesus** got up on that pulpit,
the **people** were **hoping** that he would have all kinds of **nice things to say**,
affirming comments, **interesting** stories, something that might be **entertaining**.
Maybe he’ll have some **insight** into the **Scriptures**.
Maybe he’ll **tell us** what a **wonderful community** we have here.

But when Jesus began his **preaching**, his **opening line** was,
“The kingdom of God is at hand. **Repent!** (paraphrase, Mk 1:15).
“Repent!”

Who needs to **repent**?
Sinners need to repent.

Jesus is sounding very **accusatory**.
Jesus is **pointing** his **finger**.
Jesus is being very **harsh, critical**, and **direct**.

Jesus would have spoken like this.

“You are supposed to be **loving people**,
and look at how unkind, impatient, rough and mean you are with each other.”
“You are supposed to be **generous**,
and look at how selfish and greedy and materialistic you are.”
“You are supposed to **love God** with your **whole heart, mind, and soul**,
and you come to church for an hour and don’t think about God the rest of the week.”
“You are supposed to **forgive people** who have hurt you,
and you are resentful, and retaliate, and try to get even, and punish.”

And the **people** in the synagogue **rebelled**.
“**What gives you, Jesus, the right to talk to us like that?**
You are no better than any of us!
We were doing just fine before you got here!
We don’t have to listen to your accusations!”

And the **people took offense** at him
and they rose up in **protest**.
It is much easier to **attack** the **speaker**,
to **stone** the **messenger**,
than to change from one’s evil ways.

Jesus has a very powerful **saying**,
“**Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me**” (Mt 11:6).

When Jesus says, “Love your neighbor,”
and the **person actually does love** their neighbor,
the person takes **no offense** at **Jesus** or **his words**.
It is the same when Jesus makes the call to generosity, or faithfulness, or forgiveness.
If a person is doing these things,
the person takes no offense at Jesus or his words.

But **people lash out** and are **mean** when **confronted** with their **shortcomings**.

Most of the people in Nazareth were **unwilling to admit** how **far off course** they were,
and how **stuck** there were in their **bad habits**, their **evil ways**.
And they **stubbornly refused** to **change**.
For them, that day, **church** was **not** a “**feel good**” experience.
Church was an **uncomfortable** place to be.
And they **took offense at Jesus**, the **prophet**, when he **challenged** them to **do better**.

So should this be a “**feel good**” Mass?

Does Jesus, the prophet, want us to **sit back**,
and **be comfortable** with ourselves,
because we are doing **just fine**, thank you,
and we are **following** Jesus **perfectly**
and we are in **no need** of **change** or **improvement**?

Let’s not fool ourselves.

Jesus called the people in Nazareth to **greater holiness**,
and **his prophet** is **calling you to greater holiness right now**.

Husband and **wives**, you promised to love each other for the rest of your lives.
But you’ve been temperamental, uncharitable, and crabby at times with each other.
You know that you could be kinder to your spouse, give better quality time,
give greater attention, and be more gentle.

Moms and **dads**, you’ve been busy, maybe too busy, thinking about yourself too much.
Give your kids lots of time and attention. Guide them with your excellent example.

Children. You have not been listening to your parents. You talk back.
When they ask you to do something, you don’t do it right away.
Obey your parents. Respect them. Cooperate with them.

Brothers and **sisters.** You’ve been fighting, saying mean things to each other.
It is time for a truce, for hostilities to end, to play together, share, be friendly.

Those who have fallen on **hard times**, people with **ailment**, a **medical condition**,
a **bad situation at work**, a **conflict** with someone,
and you have been grumpy, irritable, grouchy, and short-tempered.
It is high time to be more positive, upbeat, pleasant, and good natured.

This is **not** a “**feel good**” homily.
It is a **prophetic homily** that calls us to **greater holiness**.
If it makes us **uncomfortable**, maybe it should.
The **people** in the synagogue in **Nazareth** took **great offense at Jesus**.
Jesus is **hoping** to get a **warmer reception from us**.
Jesus has **his ideal for us**: “**Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me**” (Mt 11:6).