

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

## **The Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year**

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*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Reading 1

### Ezekiel 2:2-5

As the LORD spoke to me, the spirit entered into me  
and set me on my feet,  
and I heard the one who was speaking say to me:  
Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites,  
rebels who have rebelled against me;  
they and their ancestors have revolted against me to this very day.  
Hard of face and obstinate of heart  
are they to whom I am sending you.  
But you shall say to them: Thus says the LORD GOD!  
And whether they heed or resist—for they are a rebellious house—  
they shall know that a prophet has been among them.

## Responsorial Psalm

### Psalm 123:1-2, 2, 3-4

R. (2cd) **Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**  
To you I lift up my eyes  
who are enthroned in heaven —  
As the eyes of servants  
are on the hands of their masters.  
R. **Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

As the eyes of a maid  
are on the hands of her mistress,  
So are our eyes on the LORD, our God,  
till he have pity on us.  
R. **Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

Have pity on us, O LORD, have pity on us,  
for we are more than sated with contempt;  
our souls are more than sated  
with the mockery of the arrogant,  
with the contempt of the proud.  
R. **Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.**

## Reading 2

### 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Brothers and sisters:

That I, Paul, might not become too elated,  
because of the abundance of the revelations,  
a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan,  
to beat me, to keep me from being too elated.  
Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me,  
but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,  
for power is made perfect in weakness."  
I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses,  
in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me.  
Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults,  
hardships, persecutions, and constraints,  
for the sake of Christ;  
for when I am weak, then I am strong.

## Alleluia

### Cf. Luke 4:18

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
for he sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

## 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 Joses 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.

# Exegesis

## Ezekiel 2:2-5

Ezekiel was a cultic priest of Israel who was among the exiles deported by Nebuchadnezzar in the year 597 B.C.. Our passage today is the call of Ezekiel by God to be His Prophet. He is in Babylon by the river Chebar in the land of the Chaldeans. He is the first prophet to be called outside of the Holy Land.

Ezekiel experiences a rather profound experience of God, “There the hand of the Lord came upon me.” (Ez 1:3). Amid the theophany Ezekiel fell on his face. In the bible our pericope begins, “When I had seen it, I fell upon my face and heard the voice that said to me: Son of man, stand up! I wish to speak with you.” (Ez 2:1).

Ezekiel felt the Spirit of God enter him. God calls him *son of man*, an expression that appears 90 times in *Ezekiel*. The title clarifies that it is the voice and the Spirit of God that is speaking through an earthen, human vessel. It is God’s initiative to speak to His chosen people. He is choosing, calling, and sending Ezekiel. In subsequent verses Ezekiel is giving a scroll of the Word of God that he literally consumes. He is called to embody the Word of God in his being. The scroll is entitled, *Lamentation and Wailing and Woe*. (Ez 2:9).

Ezekiel is warned by God that his task was not going to be easy and his message not going to be received well. In fact, he is warned of rebellion, of obstinate hearts and of rejection. He is warned that he will be sitting on scorpions, i.e., he will be under attack, and he is assured by God that he has nothing to fear, because the hand of God is with him.

God acknowledges that some will heed and some will resist. Ezekiel’s job is to deliver the message and convince them that God is the sender, and that he is just the messenger. His initial prophesy is not a popular one. God calls out their infidelity and informs them of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel’s job is to be a messenger of Truth.

## Psalm 123:1-2, 2, 3-4

This is a rare occasion where an entire Psalm is proclaimed at Mass. Psalm 123 consists of 4 verses. The psalm is entitled, *Reliance on the Lord, a Song of Ascents*. “To You I raise my eyes.” Our eyes are fixed on the hand of the master or the hand of the mistress, which provides an analogy for the hand of God. From the hand of God comes power, grace and salvation. The image of turning our focus toward God beautifully ties our readings together this weekend. Ezekiel turns to God, St. Paul looks to God in his weakness, and Jesus turns to His Father as He experiences obstacles and rejection.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Paul is addressing the Church of Corinth that is experiencing some turmoil and is being misled by various leaders. He is facing opposition in his ministry and in his preaching. He speaks of opponents, false apostles, deceitful and even satanic activity infiltrating the Church at Corinth.

Paul states that he could boast of the personal revelations and experiences of Christ, e.g. his conversion/calling at Damascus. Paul speaks of profound theophanies that others have shared with him, e.g., 12:1-4. Yet, Paul chooses to speak of the power of God working through his weakness, which is evidence of Christ working through him.

Paul boasts of *A thorn in the flesh*: This is widely interpreted as a psychic or physical ailment, which in Jewish tradition was caused by demon or by Satan. The two phrases, however, are not causally related but stand in opposition, suggesting an external personal source of affliction, which is confirmed by the use of *thorns* in the OT to enemies, e.g., Num 33:55.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” The word that we translate as *perfect* is *teleo* in the original Greek. The etymology of the word suggests that at its deepest level it means the fulfillment of the purpose for which God created and intends it to be, e.g. to reach an end or fulfillment intended by its manufacturer. For Paul to become perfect is his role as an apostle for Christ he must decrease, and Christ must increase. In Paul’s own words, “I have been crucified with Christ; It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal 2:20). Therefore, in Paul’s humanity and weakness the power of Christ can be seen with greater clarity.

### Mark 6:1-6

Jesus has returned to his hometown of Nazareth. His recent journey took him across the Sea of Galilee into gentile territory and most recently he returned to the west side of the Sea. There he was met by Jairus who was pleading for his daughter who was dying and subsequently died. On route to the home of Jairus He was confronted by the woman with the hemorrhage of 12 years. Jesus healed the woman and proceeded on to raise the little girl back to life. Now He has left that place and moved on to a synagogue in Nazareth. Word of His teachings and His miracles, i.e., calming the sea, driving out demons, healing the sick, raising dead, must have preceded Him as He journeyed home.

His teaching in the synagogue is such that the people were astonished. There was something in and flowing through Him that was not human, or familiar or natural; that was recognizable to those who were there. They ask about the source of the wisdom that is flowing through Him. The word for wisdom is *Sophia* in the original Greek. It is the only time the word appears in Mark’s gospel. The word *Sophia* would have been recognizable as it is used throughout the OT to speak of the Spirit of God.

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1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; N.J.; page 828.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Mark 6:1-6

“What mighty works are wrought by His hands!” The word translated as mighty works is *dynamis* in the Greek which is often translated as *miracle* in the NT. It is also related to the power of God or of God’s word to effect reality. The power of the hand of God is also alluded to in this question.

Jesus is all too familiar to them; they know His mother and his family. One of the most debated historical issues over the centuries has been this section referring to Christ’s brothers and sisters. St. Jerome explains that Mark is referring to cousins of Jesus, perhaps the children of Mary’s sister.

Jesus entered a synagogue in Galilee in Mark 1:21 and His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee. (Mk 1:28) In Mark 3:1 Jesus again enters a synagogue, and He heals the man with a withered hand on the sabbath... and the Pharisees and Herodians took counsel against Him to put Him to death. Jesus enters the synagogue in Nazareth as reported in the 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Mark (today’s gospel) and He is rejected. In the *Gospel of Mark* this is Jesus’ final synagogue appearance. The pericope is entitled *The Rejection at Nazareth*. The rejection is clearly the overriding theme. It is an echo of the OT motif of the rejected prophet (2 Chr 24:19; 36:16; Neh 9:26, 30; Jer 35:15, Ez 2:5; Hos 9:7; Dan 9:6, 10) which Luke expands into a major theme of his gospel (see especially Luke 4:16-30)<sup>2</sup>

*He was not able to do any mighty deeds there and He was amazed at their lack of faith* are intricately related. In His recent prior mighty deeds, i.e. the curing of the woman with a hemorrhage and the raising of Jairus’ daughter, Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you”; and to Jairus, “Do not be afraid, just have faith.” Jesus still retains the power to do mighty works in the face of disbelief. What He cannot do is compel acceptance.<sup>3</sup>

*He was amazed at their lack of faith.* The Greek word for amazed is *ethaumazen* which is often used to describe the positive reactions to the mighty works or miracles of Jesus. The word for lack of faith or unbelief is *apistis*. The word typically used for belief or faith is *pistis*. As it appears throughout the NT it means something more than the surface definition of an ascent of a truth or the recital of a creed. It means to accept the gift of and to remain connected to the Spirit of God. God is love and love requires free choice. Foundational spiritual physics dictate that God does not impede our free will. We can choose to accept or reject the prophet in our midst. We can choose to accept or reject God. We can accept or reject the gift of life itself.

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2. Donahue, Harrington; Sacra Pagina Series, The Gospel of Mark; L.P.; Collegeville, MN; page 185.

3. Ibid., page 186.

## Reflection

This weekend our readings, as usual, challenge us to focus more intently on God. Our Psalm, as it often does, pulls together the readings and the message, “Our eyes are fixed on the Lord.” The question is, “Are they?” Are our eyes fixed on the Lord?

It has been said that pride is the root of all evil. At its deepest level pride involves an inward look which causes us to look toward our own ego and in effect turn away from God. True humility is coming to know and understand our total dependence on God. It means coming to know our identity as a creature in need of a creator. Humility causes us to fix our eyes on the Lord.

In first reading today the Prophet Ezekiel gives full credit to the Holy Spirit which “entered into him.” The Prophet was faced with great rejection and had to feel powerless and ineffective. In his weakness and humility, the power of God shines through him. Whether the people heed or resist him, they know that God is with him and in him and speaking through him.

In our second reading St. Paul speaks of a very similar experience. He reveals to us his own personal suffering and his experience of rejection and failure. The suffering comes both from within him, and from external forces. He is humbled by an internal anguish that scholars have speculated about for centuries. Whatever it was it was a chronic condition that brought him much pain and suffering. He also experienced tremendous agony from violent opposition that he experienced, to the point of physical beatings and imprisonment. Like Jesus the real passion that he felt was the suffering of the heart and soul that comes from the rejection of the love of God that was flowing in and through him.

In their stress and struggles, both the Prophet Ezekiel and the Apostle Paul, turn toward their source of inner strength and being. Their eyes are fixed on the Lord. God is the source of their inner strength and they come to a deeper understanding of that precisely in their weakness, struggles and failures. Through it all Ezekiel knows that God is with him and the Lord assures Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

In today’s Gospel Jesus Himself experiences the sorrow of rejection in His own native place. Their lack of faith brings deep sadness to His heart and soul. His own passion is something that He experiences not only on the Cross but throughout His human experience. Ultimately the Cross of Calvary will be for all of time the point of human weakness that will radiate the power of God for all eternity.

Again, this weekend God is reminding us to trust in Him. God wants us to know, whatever storms and afflictions this world can throw at us, that His love is more powerful and that His grace is sufficient for us. To put on the heart and mind of Jesus is to humble ourselves so that we might fix our eyes on the Lord. From this vantage point of dependence, we can only look up to see a loving Father already and forever holding us in His arms. No wonder Jesus said, “You must become like little children in order to enter the Kingdom of God.”

Yours in the Holy Spirit,



## Personal Witness

Ten years ago, I gathered with my seminary classmates for an anniversary celebration and retreat. Our seminary rector, Monsignor John Canary joined us as our retreat director. It was a joy filled and very prayerful time for all of us. We were able to reminisce on our seminary experiences and share our experiences of priesthood. One of the first questions that Msgr. Canary asked us was, "What was the most notable surprise of your first 15 years of priesthood, or what caught you most off guard, or what did you feel least prepared for?" To a man everyone said, "The level of resistance and opposition to the faith." That question initiated several hours of discussion.

I discovered that my experience was very similar to each of my classmates. Most of us were quite immersed in Catholicism at various stages of our lives, beginning with a strong family experience, perhaps a Catholic grammar or high school experience, and then we spent five years in a Catholic seminary. Holy, friendly surroundings form a bit of an insulation from outside adversaries. A grace filled environment also provides a bit of a shield from the attacks of Satan and his dominions. At Mundelein Seminary, for example, we had an order of holy nuns whose sole apostolate was to pray for us seminarians 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They spent those hours in perpetual adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. It provided a shield that Satan could not pierce.

Entering parish ministry meant going out into the world, into the wilderness. Parishioners are quite diverse in their level of faith, from the very devout and pious to the unbeliever who is only there because of spouse or family. The parish exists within a secular culture of indifference and hostility. The Body of Christ is open and vulnerable. The doors are open wide for all to enter or pass by. Satan and his forces are working 24/7 to infiltrate, attack, divide, harass, oppose, discourage, and destroy. To a man each of my classmates joined me in expressing a feeling of "battle fatigue."

Each of us felt that we were on the front lines of intense and unrelenting spiritual warfare. The Church, the office of the priesthood, marriages, family life, life itself is under attack. I shared with the group that when I engaged the enemy with intentionality, I soon realized that I had a great leviathan by the tail, and I could not let go. There was collateral damage as I was being tossed around and often consumed with the struggle. As I focused on the enemy I took my eyes off Christ.

Then as I was being pulled under, I reached out my hand and Jesus was there to pull me out of the raging sea. I found myself standing on the Rock that is Christ. The experience of the battle, the woundedness, the rejection, the vitriol hatred, enveloped me into the pierced heart of Jesus. At that moment I could say with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me." I am now aware that the Passion of Christ is an ongoing ever-present reality. Each of us must die with Him to live with Him.

The Good News is that we know how this ends. The battle, the victory has already been won. The Cross is barren, and the tomb is empty. Msgr. Canary reminded us to persevere, to stay the course. He pointed out to us how the battle has drawn us all closer to Christ and to His Church. He reminded us that only in sharing in Christ's passion can we be authentic priests. We left, wounds healed, and filled with gratitude!

*F. Glenn*