

My dear brothers and sisters, today we are meditating on the prophetic role of God's chosen people. In the Bible, the word **"prophet"** have quite a broad meaning, but all refer, primarily, to the idea of **"speaking in the name of God" or being his spokesman** as the Letter to the Hebrews describes (Heb.1:1). Some prophets were called **'man of God, servant of Lord...'** no wonder the Prophet Ezekiel calls himself "son of man". The term **"son of man"** is used over 90 times in this book and has no messianic connotation here. Man, that is mortal flesh, is contrasted with God who is an immortal spirit and commissioning him to speak to the Israelites, who have rebelled against God; their rebelliousness involves **arrogance** towards God, **rejection of his commandments**, and **refusal to listen** to what he says. It makes them stubborn. They and their ancestors have revolted against God to this very day. Ezekiel is to announce God's judgment to the people and then stand firm, not wavering even in the face of an almost certain unfavorable reaction. God charges Ezekiel with the mission to speak the word of God to a people so hardened in disobedience that they will not listen; rather, they will oppose him as a deadly enemy. But the **prophet is to speak despite all oppositions**.

Jesus, prophet Per Excellence, also experiences rejection by his own people. According to Mark, Jesus arrives at Nazareth accompanied by his disciples and with the reputation of being a **prophetic healer**. His neighbors don't know what to think. When the Sabbath arrives, Jesus enters into the small village synagogue and **"begins to teach"**. His neighbors and relatives hardly listen to him. Within them all kinds of questions are arising. They know Jesus from childhood: he's one more neighbor. **Where has he learned that surprising message about God's reign? From whom has he received that power to heal?** Mark says that Jesus "had them upset". Why? Those villagers believe that they know all about Jesus. They have an idea of him from his childhood. Instead of welcoming him as he presents himself before them, they get stuck by the image they have of him. That image keeps them from opening themselves up to the **mystery that Jesus contains**. They resist discovering that in him the saving God has drawn near. The Galilean villagers see in his healing actions and in his words of fire the actions of a prophet moved by God's Spirit. Jesus knows that a difficult life of conflict awaits him. The religious leaders will confront him. It's the destiny of every prophet. He doesn't yet suspect that he will be rejected precisely by his own people, those who know him best from his childhood. It seems that Jesus' rejection in his village of Nazareth was often commented upon by early Christians. Three Gospel writers recount the episode in great detail. **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."**

The Galilean villagers describe their knowledge of Jesus as follows: is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Remember that the **New Testament never speaks of other children of Mary or Joseph**, so it is impossible to prove from the Bible that Jesus actually had blood brothers or sisters. The noun **"brothers"** is used in the NT for the followers of Jesus more than one hundred times; for example, the risen Jesus asked Mary Magdalene to **"go to my brothers"** (Jn. 20:17-18, Lk. 8:21). According to St. Jerome, both Mary and Joseph were virgins and this virginity as a symbol for encouraging the monastic, celibate life. Thus, St. Jerome argued on the basis of his interpretation of the NT evidence that the **brothers of Jesus are in fact his cousins**. This view through the influence of St. Jerome became the almost universal view in the Western church, and that is why it is familiar to Roman Catholics.

Paul was a very intelligent man, well-educated and, obviously, very talented. Even though he had visions of Jesus, which converted him, Paul then went and preached everywhere. He too suffered from some kind of **weakness**, although he doesn't say what it was. In today's second reading, you can really sense his frustration as he says that three times he asked God to take this thing away from him, and three times God said 'No, my strength is at its best in weakness.' **"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."** Paul's petition for relief was denied, indicating that his suffering was serving a higher purpose in the plan of God. Grace was given him to endure these trials and make him rely upon the Lord. His experience shows that God gives us what we **need and not always what we want**

Beloved in Christ, finally, I have no doubt that all of us probably feel that we would be much better off if we could overcome our weaknesses. Perhaps these readings will help us to see that the Lord knows what He is doing when He allows us to struggle with them. Yes, they are frustrating, but they can also be a gift in the sense that they make us rely on the power of God more than on ourselves. It also reminds us that it is not a question of being **'good enough'** for God. We will never be good enough, but that doesn't matter. As long as we know that we are weak then we will see that we have someone to turn to who really can and will help us. May God give us grace to be His spoke person in spite of our weakness. Amen!