

FATHER PETER'S HOMILY - FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

In the first reading we see the prophet Ezekiel being given the difficult task of trying to proclaim God's word to an obstinate and rebellious people.

I always think it's funny that we have this reading, as well as today's Gospel, on the first Sunday of July when pastors and associates are arriving at their new parishes!

June 1st marked the beginning of the third year of my ministry here at St. Joseph's.

I thank God for the spiritual blessings we have shared over the past two years.

I can't help but think of my own weaknesses as I listen to St. Paul talk about his "thorn in the flesh."

Scripture scholars suggest that Paul suffered from some kind of physical or psychological malady which caused him great distress.

The examples of Ezekiel and Paul bear witness to the fact that persons of faith are not immune to difficulties and weaknesses.

Of course, we shouldn't be surprised by this since Jesus himself experienced many trials in his life and ministry.

We see in this week's Gospel that the people who watched Jesus grow up "took offense at him" and refused to believe that he was someone sent by God.

Jesus also suffered rejection by other groups, especially the scribes and the Pharisees, and he had to endure misunderstanding, denial, and betrayal by his own chosen disciples.

As Jesus faced the prospect of his Passion in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was terrified, and asked the Father to take the cup away, if possible, even as he prays, "Your will be done."

And on the cross Jesus experiences the full range of physical and emotional pain as he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

But those are not his last words.

Rather, Jesus surrenders in complete trust to the Father as he says, "Into your hands I commit my spirit."

For people of faith, suffering and weakness are opportunities for us to declare our total dependence on God.

As the Lord said to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

What does that mean?

God did not want Paul to fall into pride by thinking he had earned God's favor, or that his successes were due to his own strength.

Throughout salvation history God chooses the weak and makes them strong as instruments of divine, not human, power.

Just think of Moses who possibly stuttered, David who was just a young shepherd, or Peter with all his faults and failings.

In our own time we learned that Mother Theresa suffered from a great spiritual dryness yet continued to minister joyfully to the poor and outcast.

The good news is that our weaknesses do not disqualify us from God's service; if they did, I would certainly be out of a job!

None of us is perfect and we don't have to be.

What's important is that we allow our weaknesses to become opportunities to experience God's mercy and grace.

Because God is compassionate towards us in our brokenness, you and I can become more compassionate towards others in their brokenness.

That's when we can truly say with St. Paul, "the power of Christ dwells in me."