

Rejecting Jesus

Now that we are in the period the church calls “Ordinary Time,” we have been reading from the Gospel according to Mark. If you have been following the story line, you have noticed that the Gospels for the past few weeks have focused our attention on Jesus’ powerful deeds, which point to the kingdom of God: the stilling of the storm at sea, the curing of a sick woman suffering from hemorrhages, and the raising of Jairus’s daughter from the dead. But in today’s Gospel, Jesus returns to Nazareth, having preached about the kingdom of God and performed so many mighty deeds. Once he is home, he enters the synagogue where he worships every Sabbath, and there he is rejected.

Jesus is rejected by those who know him best because they cannot understand how this man, with whom they have grown up, can make the claims he does. How can this Jesus they know so well, be the preacher of the kingdom of God? Where did he get this wisdom? How can he perform such mighty deeds? How can he make such claims about God? How dare he call us to repentance!

Jesus is too much for his compatriots because they think they know him so well; he is too familiar to them. They cannot understand how he can be a prophet. They do not understand that he is the Son of God. And so they reject him. They do not heed his message despite its wisdom. They do not heed his message despite his mighty deeds. They reject him because he is too familiar to them. He is one of them.

The world has been rejecting Jesus for a long time. Nearly everybody agrees he was a good man. Most people, even those who are not Christian, admire his message of love and compassion. And nearly everybody agrees that he performed extraordinary deeds during his lifetime. But the world refuses to accept his central message: that he is God’s messenger of the kingdom of God, that the kingdom of God has made its appearance in him. The world refuses to believe that his death was the redemption of the world, the act by which God overcame the powers of sin and death. The world refuses to believe that Jesus was sent by God to reveal God to the world for the salvation of the world. The world refuses to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. And so the world has always rejected Jesus, and continues to do so.

It is not surprising that the world rejects Jesus. What is surprising, and more disturbing, is the way in which believers unknowingly reject Jesus. To be sure believers do not explicitly reject Jesus in the way the world does. After all, believers continue to profess their faith in him. But there are moments when we become so familiar with Jesus that we take him for granted. There are moments when we become so familiar with Jesus that we no longer hear the word he speaks to it. We are no longer challenged by that word, which we take for granted. We no longer hear the word spoken to us.

Jesus can be rejected in many different ways. He is rejected when we pick and choose what we believe about the gospel he preaches. When we follow Jesus conditionally, depending upon our mood, we reject Jesus. When we mold Jesus and his message to our own image and

likeness, we reject Jesus. When we chose what we want to believe and what we refuse to believe, we reject Jesus.

Jesus has always been rejected. But we of all people should know better. After all, we have been given the grace of faith, the grace of knowing and loving him. *Father Matera*