

14TH SUND. ORD. (B)

THE POWER OF GOD AND THE WEAKNESS OF MAN

Why are human beings rebellious? Children rebel against parents, students against teachers, wives against husbands and vice versa, people against governments, employees against employers, and many more. After the fall, human beings have been rebellious against God and this has infiltrated into the fabric of our being. This is because after the fall we have become weak, and the tempter is still following us. But God is always using some of us to remind us that despite our weaknesses He can help us to turn to Him.

The Israelites were chosen by God to be His own people, but whenever they encountered a problem or difficulty in their lives, they turned their backs toward God and they rebelled against Him. But at the end of the day, it was the same God who rescued them from their troubles.

God always uses the weak to show His power to transform and to save. Ezekiel was made strong by the power of the Spirit of God. He became strong and he was sent to the Israelites who had been revolting against God. He was transformed and became a different person altogether, a prophet to be the mouth piece of God.

The rebellious nature of human beings is seen also in the gospel. Jesus was not accepted in His own town by His own people. They found Him as one of them, and wondered how a carpenter could exhibit such power. It is said that “familiarity breeds contempt”. This is exactly what happened to Jesus. The world tends to ignore common people and common things, because they do not seem to be important. But “God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong” (1Cor.1:27).

St. Paul in the second reading, is making us aware that the grace of God is all that we need to be able to overcome our weaknesses. Our weaknesses and shortcomings are to remind us of our vulnerability, and that left to ourselves we cannot achieve anything. It does not mean also that we should allow our weaknesses to take control over us thinking that that is what God wants it to be in order to show His power. St. Paul prayed to be set free from the temptations or the troubles he was going through and he received the grace of God to strengthen him. He was not happy in the state he found himself, so he asked for God’s intervention. Indeed the power of God is manifested through weakness, and God uses those who are weak to accomplish His plans. Moses was a murderer, but he was made to lead the Israelites to freedom; Matthew was a tax

collector, and Simon Peter was a common fisherman, but they became apostles.

The letter to the Hebrews how God chooses the weak to help the weak: "Every high priest is taken from among human beings and is appointed to act on their behalf in relationships with God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can sympathize with those who are ignorant or who have gone astray, for he himself is beset by weakness. That is why he has to make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people" (Heb.5:1-3).

In so many ways we can also rebel against God and refuse to accept Jesus into our lives. His people saw Him as an ordinary person and doubted what He could do for them. Due to their lack of faith they missed many opportunities. In the same way we can look at many things in the Church as common things and fail to realize that they are channels of God's grace. The Eucharist we celebrate every day is the surest opportunity to receive God's grace and to have life. God shows His power through the common bread and wine which become food for the soul. But it may become such a common thing that many of us may deprive ourselves of its saving grace. So also the other Sacraments, water for Baptism, oil for Confirmation and Holy Orders are common things which bring us God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pride can prevent us from receiving God's grace because we may think that we do not need anybody's help. We can even look down upon the one who is giving us God's message, as it happened to Jesus and many of the prophets. The other capital sins - envy, gluttony, anger, sloth, lust, and greed - are other means to rebel against God.

There is the need to cooperate with God in order to receive the graces we need. Paul prayed for help, unlike the townsfolk of Nazareth. We have to pray; we have to admit that we are weak and spiritually sick and so we need healing. Paul surrendered himself to the will of God, thus he was ready to face all insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints.

Do I realize that whatever I can do is by God's grace? Getting up in the morning, taking a step, opening my mouth to talk and to eat, lifting the load, jumping here and there, thinking and planning, seeing and smelling? The message to Paul is a message to you and me that we need God's grace to accomplish all that we want to achieve, and to be saved.