

Who will Accept an Unacceptable Messiah?

Today, Jesus, the prophetic Messiah—who preaches in his hometown but heals elsewhere—speaks to us from the synagogue at Nazareth. His message is one of inclusiveness. He reminds his listeners (and us) that the prophet Elijah was sent to the hungry Gentile widow at Zarephath and that Elisha was sent to cure the leper Naaman, a Syrian Gentile.

The gospel scene gives us a vivid picture of the human condition and the need for a Messiah who will save Jew and Gentile alike. The townspeople initially listen to Jesus with approval, however, once they realize the impact of his message of discipleship, they become angry and attempt to kill him.

Written by an ancient author, this gospel scene is still relevant for us today. Reflect on the following event which took place in a Catholic Church the last time this gospel narrative was proclaimed.

A pastor of a Wisconsin parish decided to focus the liturgy for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time on inclusiveness. He invited a religious sister, a daughter of the parish—who had recently returned from ministry in a small Texas border town—to speak at the end of Mass. Sister spoke passionately of her work with the poor and referred to the disciple's call to “the preferential option for the poor” and the need for immigration reform. Sister provoked quite an uproar in the parish:

- One person felt he needed to “confront” sister in the back of church and set her straight. She was not savvy enough to see the other side of the matter.
- Several parishioners walked to their cars shaking their heads. What are convents teaching
- A couple felt the urgency to write the bishop informing him of a pastor who permitted a sister give such egregious remarks from the altar. Parishioners will be persuaded to support illegal aliens coming into this country. The couple recommended that the bishop talk to the pastor and the sister so that this situation is not repeated.

Centuries ago, Jesus, our brother and savior, stood up in the synagogue at Nazareth and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He proclaimed an incarnational message, that he came to bring the good news of his healing mission to the poor, to captives, the blind, and those we put down. It was true then and it is true now—we know what Jesus expects of us. Where will we place our favor? Will we be his disciples committed to accepting the message of inclusiveness and hearing the call of our 21st Century Messiah?