Homily: 14th Sunday Ordinary Time (yr. B, 2024)

For those of you older than forty and unless you grew up in a household that didn’t have television, I’m willing to make a bet that you remember the old cartoon series Looney Tunes. A favorite character in the series was a romantic skunk called Pepe LePew. Pepe was always falling in love with someone. But because of his unpleasant odor, remember he was a skunk; Pepe’s love was always rejected. But that didn’t stop Pepe. He went right on loving, no matter how many times he was rejected. Pepe never gave up on people or love and that’s why he became a favorite to so many. And doesn’t that remind us of JESUS? Our most basic teaching about JESUS, is that HE is both GOD and Human. HE is equal to GOD the FATHER and the HOLY SPIRIT in all things. And HE is like us in all things, but sin. And HIS Humanity definitely comes out in this Gospel. Born and raised in Nazareth, HE was just one of the boys in HIS neighborhood. Is HE not the carpenter, the SON of Mary? Don’t we know HIS Family? They seem to be saying; we’ve always known HIM, but we don’t ever remember HIM talking like this before! It happens all the time, even into our own day. As they say, you can’t judge a book by it’s cover. Aren’t we sometimes shocked by how someone we knew eventually turned out? Aren’t we sometimes shocked by another person’s taste or choice in either books, art, movies, or people? Everyone has their own favorite actress, actor or author. And let’s be honest here, we sometimes don’t share their favorites, and they don’t share ours. Even in the Church, there are different theologies or different spiritualities. Several years ago, it was reported that Bishop Fulton Sheen was bluntly told by his college debate coach; that he was the absolute worst speaker he had ever heard. Ernest Hemingway was once told by a teacher; forget about writing, you don’t have enough talent for it. Richard Hooker, the author of MASH, had his book rejected by at least six publishers before it was finally accepted and became a runaway best-seller. The people in JESUS’S neighborhood are obviously shocked by the person HE’S become. Remember when JESUS is found in the Temple when HE was twelve years old? How does that Gospel end? HE went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. JESUS was obviously known as a nice boy; obedient to HIS Parents, WHO didn’t cause any problems. HE was a good Jewish boy, WHO obediently followed the Torah as especially HIS Father Joseph taught HIM. So, JESUS was a well-known person in that neighborhood who didn’t cause any waves and wouldn’t have attracted any undue; certainly not negative; attention. All of a sudden however, the situation is changed. JESUS is quite a bit different from what they remembered! HE is talking and acting way different from what they remembered. Fairly quiet in the neighborhood back then, JESUS is now making the Lame walk, the deaf hear, and the blind see. Words HE is speaking also seem to be causing a stir! Where did this MAN get all this, and what kind of wisdom has been given HIM? All the Rabbis back then, had a method of teaching, and argued a particular way, usually referring to Scripture. While there’s no question there were some fierce debates between the groups, between the Pharisees and Sadducees for instance, differences of opinion or different ways of interpreting the Law was usually tolerated and accepted. JESUS, however, has a completely different method, and they don’t like it. They took offense at HIM. HE’s not the usual run of the mill Rabbi, merely arguing a certain point in the Torah. HE’s not doing it like the other Rabbis. Is HE challenging them more than they’re used too? Or are HIS Words taking them more out of their comfort zone than they want to be? Whatever it is, we’re told, JESUS is amazed at their lack of Faith. HE seems to attribute it to the fact that a prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house. One thing is clear. Much like Pepe LePew, JESUS doesn’t stop loving. JESUS didn’t give up HIS Ministry and escape into the desert. No one likes to be rejected. No one likes to be hurt. JESUS, as an authentic human person, again, like us, in all things but sin, is no exception. But here, HE makes a significant decision. HE is determined to continue and will continue even to the Wood of the Cross. On fire with embracing the FATHER’S Call; HE won’t back down. HE will stay with them, giving them the FATHER’S Word no matter how much or how often HE’S rejected. As JESUS goes about forming HIS Church and supporting HIS Disciples, who will soon become Apostles, HE gives us a stark warning elsewhere in the Gospel. If they hate you, know they’ve hated ME before you. Continuing the Mission of JESUS our Message will sometimes be rejected, and rejected fiercely. But like Pepe LePew, especially like JESUS, we are called to persevere. The Gift of the HOLY SPIRIT, the Gift of the Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation especially strengthen us to keep up the Mission. The teachings of JESUS were often unpopular in the first century. The teachings of the Church will often be unpopular in the twenty-first century. Fr. Earl Meyer writes: the Catholic position on the beginning of life and the end of life, nuclear war and economic justice, marriage and family, disturb many. But they are rooted in the gospel and have developed consistently through the centuries. It would be irresponsible to the heritage of our faith, and to the integrity of our own conscience, to dismiss them as outdated and adopt the prevailing secular culture.” So, we continue the Mission of the ONE WHOM they took offense at, knowing that two thousand years later, they will also take offense at us. According to many scholars, today’s Gospel introduces a new theme in Mark’s Gospel. The blindness of people to the authority of JESUS. They consider JESUS too much “one of them” to be taken seriously. They are too obsessed with occupation, ancestry and origins to realize GOD is truly present in their midst through JESUS. In accepting the Call to Follow JESUS we are called to integrity, courage and generosity, to mirror the JESUS of the Gospel. Disciples will also be prophets. We will not only live the Word we hear, but we will Proclaim it to others as well and that will often mean we are ridiculed, rejected, even at times ostracized. But in the words of Jay Comier; “genuine Faith never falters in the conviction that the justice of GOD will triumph over injustice, that HIS Mercy will triumph over hatred, that HIS Light will triumph over the darkness of sin and death. Called to be on Mission, we are called to do hard things at times. We are called by GOD to be prophetic even in difficult situations. In our First Reading, GOD sends the Prophet Ezekiel to preach to the rebellious Israelites who want nothing to do with him. The odds of success are stacked against Ezekiel given the obstinance of the people. But through the Power of the SPIRIT Ezekiel rises up and goes out to do GOD’s Work. Ezekiel is assured he will have an impact, even if it’s not the full conversion to which GOD calls the Israelites. How does the reading end? They shall know that a prophet has been among them. Because of our Baptism, each one of us is chosen, unique, and unrepeatable; called by GOD to put our unique set of gifts into the service of others. Yes, even with all our sins and faults; all of us are called to sanctify the world and to share GOD’S Word. Like Ezekiel, we are assured we will have an impact; even if a full conversion doesn’t happen, they shall know that a prophet has been among them.