

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

A guy joins a monastery and takes a vow of silence, though he's allowed to say two words every seven years. After the first seven years, the elders bring him in and ask for his two words. "Cold floors," he says. They nod and send him away. Seven more years pass. They bring him back in and ask for his two words. "Bad food" he says. They nod and send him away.

Seven more years pass they bring him in for his two words. "I quit" he says. I am not surprised in the least, says the head monk. You have done nothing but complain since you got here.

Dear friends,

Happy 4th of July. Every nation has undergone some sort of slavery. Our forefathers untied everyone to get freedom for the nation. We are so grateful for them because they gave us a free nation. It is a day to offer our country and all its citizens on the altar of God, asking for His special providential care, protection, and blessings.

Today's readings focus on the challenges of being a prophet in the world. To be a Christ's true follower, one needs more courage and strength. If we follow Christ truly, we will face rejections, failures, challenges, and struggles. It is not an easy path.

In the first reading, prophet Ezekiel was asked to deliver a challenging message to the people of Israel, a message of condemnation. It is always easy to share a good message. It is not easy to share some shocking or sad message. You might have experienced in your life in some situation. All the prophets in the Old Testament had a tough time of delivering their message. Ezekiel did not speak his word but God's. The human mind reads everyone as the same.

In the second reading St. Paul had the same thought. He talked about a thorn in the flesh. It was traditionally interpreted some physical disability or psychological disorder. He felt the rejections in some places. He had to say and preach harshly in some towns.

Jesus too faces rejection and alienation right in his own town. Instead of feeling pride and gratitude that God has chosen one of their own to be his spokesperson, they question him. While marveling at his exceptional deeds and brilliant teaching skills, they push to find a human explanation instead of seeing simple and unimpressive a resume.

Faith is being present to God ourselves. Shortly after his conversion, St. Augustine penned these immortal words: "Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things that you created. You were with me, but I was not with you." ([Confessions 10:27](#))

Augustine, sincere, but pathologically restless, had been searching for love and God. Eventually he found them in the most unexpected of all places, inside of himself. God and love had been inside of him all along, but he had hadn't been inside of himself.

The secret to prayer is not to try to make God present, but to make ourselves present to God. There is a lesson here: we do not pray to make God present to us. God is already present, always present everywhere. We pray to make ourselves present to God. As Sheila Cassidy colorfully puts it, God is no more present in church than in a drinking bar, but we generally are more present to God in church than we are in a drinking bar. The problem of presence is not with God, but with us.

To be Jesus' follower is not always an easy path to walk. Rejection and humiliation are part of a commitment. Prayer and faith in God will only strengthen us.