

## 4th Ordinary Sunday C

“Is he not the son of Joseph?” That is what the people asked after listening to the gracious words that came from the mouth of Jesus. Jesus was in his native place of Nazareth. That is where he grew up. The people in Nazareth knew him, as he had grown up with them. But they knew him merely as the son of Joseph and failed to know his real identity.

Joshua Bell is a world-famous violinist who was born in Indiana and made his debut in 1985 at the age of 17. He has played in concerts all over the world. The least ticket to his concert can cost you \$100. One day he played during the rush hour as a street musician at the entrance to the metro subway station in front of L'Enfant Plaza in Washington, D.C. on January 12, 2007. You know the people who pass that way—those fancy-titled bureaucrats and government workers. This was an experiment by those at the *Washington Post*, and they videotaped it using a hidden camera, and it is now on YouTube. He played six wonderful classical pieces. Of the 1,097 people who passed by, only seven stopped to listen to him, and only one recognized him. After about 45 minutes of his performance, what he collected was \$32.17. The previous day he had collected \$75,000 for an hour-long performance in a concert hall. At the end of his subway performance, he took the money out of his instrument case and placed his \$3.5 million Stradivarius violin in it. Most of the people who passed by were on their cell phones or iPods, and they had no time to stop and listen or to know the person who was playing. Very often we too are very busy with our electronic gadgets so that we fail to listen to God and recognize his voice.

The people in the Gospel of today who listened to Jesus failed to recognize the real identity of Jesus. We today fail to recognize the prophets in our midst and we ignore them. Most people do not like the prophets because they speak the truth, and that makes them uncomfortable. In the depth of their hearts, they know that it is true, but they do not want to admit it. We will always be unhappy if we do not accept the truth and change our lives.

A family struggling with rampant dysfunction sought the help of a professional counselor. While meeting with the counselor, their 7-year-old son said, “My Daddy drinks too much and then he is bad.” There is the simple and direct truth. But that was not what his Daddy wanted to hear. So his Daddy said, “Shut your mouth.” Mother Teresa made many people upset in this country when she said that the United States is one of the most spiritually impoverished nations. Many were upset because that is not what they wanted to hear.

Prophets are people who comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. They do not speak what we want to hear but what we need to hear. Jeremiah was one such prophet. In the first reading, Jeremiah says, “The word of the Lord came to me saying: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you a prophet to the nations. Stand up and tell them all that I command you.” A prophet is one who tells what God wants us to hear. That very often gets them into trouble.

Jesus got into serious trouble as we heard in the Gospel of today. They drove him out of their town—ready to throw him off the cliff, all because he told them the truth. The Jewish people believed that God loved them exclusively. But Jesus told them that God’s love is not exclusive. He loves everyone. He cited proof of that from the Old Testament and explained to them how God blessed two Gentiles, the widow of Zarephath and Naaman, the Syrian, while rejecting many Jews in similar situations. That went against the Jewish belief that God would never bless a Gentile. So they became furious at Jesus, and so He had to quietly escape from the crowd. Jesus experienced rejection from his own people. Jesus did not use politically correct terms when talking to people. We have to follow Christ and not political correctness. We have to speak the truth without being hypocritical and disrespectful. Truth has to be told out of love and never out of hatred or dislike. St. Paul describes love in the second reading. Read that passage daily, and make it part of your daily spiritual diet. Let us always speak truth with love. God is love and only when there is love in our hearts can we recognize God and hear His truth and accept it.