

Year B Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 8, 2012
Ez 2:2-5; Ps 123; 2 Cor 12:7-10; Mk 6:1-6

This Sunday's readings reflect the difficulty of conversion, of changing our ways and habits which tend to become so deeply ingrained, so much a part of ourselves and even of our pride in "who we are." We are called to be a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), to be conformed to Christ (Rm 8:29; 12:2; 1 Pt 1:14-16), to be the image of God, and this inevitably involves dying to what is false in us, to what is not of Christ (Gal 6:14-15), and this is very difficult.

The prophet Ezekiel, whom the Spirit of God had invaded, was sent to the just-arrived Jewish exiles in Babylon in the early sixth century B.C. These exiles had been living their lives oblivious to the calamity which was coming upon them, the invasion by the Babylonians who would destroy God's temple and the Holy Land and take the upper classes and the skilled workers to the pagan land of Babylon (see 2 Kgs 24:10-16). The people had not heeded the warnings of the prophet Jeremiah (see Jer 7), and now they were in exile, but still rebellious. It would be the task of Ezekiel to make them aware of where and how they had gone wrong. This he set out to do and then some (see, e.g., Ez 8 and 16), so that the people became very despairing of their future (see Ez 33:10, "How are we to live?"; 37:11). But after making the people aware of just how serious breaking God's law is, and with what consequences, Ezekiel delivers a hopeful message, one which breaks through fatalism ('there's nothing we can do') and instills a sense of personal responsibility (Ez 18). What is more, the real initiative comes from God, the creator and redeemer. It is God who will wash the Israelites and bring them back to life as if the Spirit invaded a valley full of dead, dry bones and made them into a 'huge power', Ez 36:16-37:14.

The psalm presents a humble prayer who, like a servant, keeps his or her eyes fixed on the Lord above, the source of all well-being. Paul too, humbly, prefers not to match his adversaries' (the "super-apostles") boasting of tremendous feats meant to show how favored they were by God, what great credentials they had. Instead, Paul, after having told his doubtful congregation about some gifts he has received and divine experiences he has had, prefers to tell of humbling experiences (2 Cor 11:30-33). To top it off, he tells of a mysterious "thorn in the flesh," whether a temptation or a disgusting condition, which he had ardently prayed to be freed

from, to no avail. He discovered that it was in this humble state that God could best work, free of competition from an arrogant ego. Jesus, too, was *unable* to perform any miracles in his hometown, where his familiarity was despised by those who had always “known” him. And Jesus was amazed at how little they understood.