

14 (B)

At the beginning of today's gospel the people were captivated by the Lord's teaching but that soon drains away when at the end of the passage He is astonished at their lack of faith.

The reputation of Jesus as a preacher and healer was quite well known at this stage. When he returned to his home town, people initially warmed to him but then a certain wariness takes over. They were wondering where He got all this wisdom and how these miracles were worked through him. After all, He was only the local carpenter's son - so they would not accept him.

Their wariness gives way to jealousy. When this 'green eyed monster' rears its ugly head, it usually casts a dark shadow over relationships. It is rightly listed as one of the seven deadly sins. What happened to Jesus at Nazareth turns out to be a kind of signature tune for the remainder of His ministry leading ultimately to His rejection on the Cross. The gospel tells us 'it was out of jealousy that they handed him over to be crucified'. Is this sin straining any of our relationships at present?

But just like the wind was taken out of Jesus's sails at Nazareth through the envy of the locals, a similar thing may have happened to St Paul. During his life he was given unique spiritual favours which could have made him feel superior to his peers and aroused jealousy among them. But to prevent him from getting too proud he was given a 'thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan' which he pleaded with the Lord to take away. This was all to no avail, however, because the Lord's power is at its best at times and in situations like this.

Paul then goes on to make his weaknesses, agonies, insults and hardships his special boast because through them he can feel the protection of Christ's power over him all the more. He's not talking here about his sins - no one should boast about them - but 'this angel of Satan' could be a person who is

consistently undermining him. The person who is envious of us can, in an inverted way, be 'that angel of Satan' to stop us from getting too proud of our own achievements. God can use even the sins of our detractors for our spiritual good. That is not in any way condoning sin. These people in knocking us off our stride can also lead us to a deeper humility and a greater reliance on God. We should pray for people who tend to be envious of us. They can be our special boast.

In fact the people of Nazareth may have done Jesus a favour. They would have put paid to any illusions he may have had of His mission being a breeze and help him rearrange his priorities so that he would be in the right frame of mind to face the ultimate rejection of his people in his sacred passion which is precisely what happened. What happened at Nazareth was a defining moment in the process. Rejections along the road of life because of petty jealousies or whatever else can be moments of grace for us too.