

# Sunday Homily

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

4 JULY 2021

YEAR B

“So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent.”

Mark 6:12

### Illustration

When it comes to sport, the home team is agreed to have the upper hand in any match. There will be more locals in the crowd, willing them on, cheering their attacks, celebrating every point scored and commiserating with their misfortunes. Travelling to another team’s ground may prove to be a rather less comfortable experience, for there the crowd will probably be indifferent, at best, to the players’ efforts, while at home the majority are right behind them. It’s a different matter when the name of the game is “imparting a message”. Instead of cheering on one of their own, the crowd may well turn on them.

### Gospel Teaching

This is precisely the situation in which Jesus found himself. The problem was, he could not deliver only messages the crowd wanted to hear – it was as though he was scoring goals for the other side. No matter if his genius was still obvious in the manoeuvres he executed, what he was doing was not what the many desired or expected – their minds were narrowed by habit and prejudice. For this reason Jesus achieved little in the way of miraculous works on home territory: the conditions were simply not favourable. His fellow townspeople were too affronted by his presumptuousness to be receptive to any works of power he might perform in their community. The problem with prophets, which you never find in sporting heroes, was that they would insist on challenging the audience; the crowd’s response was more important than the action.

Voicing a familiar proverb, Jesus notes the impossibility of being an honoured prophet among one’s own people, and, consequently, he adopts a different strategy in commissioning the disciples for their prophetic and pastoral ministry. He sends them out, to places where they are literally and metaphorically unencumbered by baggage, although not entirely alone. The reaction of the hearers elsewhere should be less prejudiced by familiarity – the disciples will play on a “level field”. The message itself is all-important, and the Lord wants it to be plain, undisguised by the livery or identity of its presenters.

## Application

As we think about this story, should we perhaps consider where we are when the Lord's message is spoken to us? Are we at the "home" or "away" ground? Too often we tend to become the insiders, the partisan crowd. Many of us have grown up with Jesus and he – and his disciples – have almost become "ours": the domesticated home team. They are at our disposal, their job is to please us and not challenge us, their targets should be the "outsiders" rather than us. The more we hear the words of scripture, the more we become comfortable with what they say: we practically know Jesus too well. So we must try to be foreigners in our listening, to hear the Gospel as if it were new every time.

Initiating a response in their audience was what the disciples, John the Baptist and the Old Testament prophets had in common with Jesus. Their vital proclamation was enhanced by plainness and strangeness, it was not the crowd-pleasing of the home team, but a stark wake-up call from somewhere else. Yet it is not only a change of heart which is required of those who hear the Gospel. For we are less obviously challenged in turn to bear the message ourselves, like the disciples, without baggage or additional protection: we too must carry the kingdom abroad.

You may be thinking that you couldn't possibly be a prophet, standing up and speaking out; or the kind of travelling preachers or healers that the apostles were, let alone another John crying in the wilderness, a Paul or even an Ezekiel, but you can. For there are two fundamental elements which are essential to Christian discipleship: how you pray and how you live.

Through diligent prayer you may become attuned to the words and ways of God. Then perhaps you may adopt values and behaviour somewhat different from those of your immediate neighbours. Thus your whole life can become part of God's message and you will find that you make a difference simply by being "on the pitch", both home and away, without ever resorting to your soapbox! Essentially re-evaluating your life in the alien light of Jesus' teaching, and changing your ways accordingly, amounts to "repentance" and, by thoughtful living, you will be proclaiming his teaching to others.