

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

Second Reading 2 Corinthians 12: 7–10

Originally the last three chapters of the Second Letter to the Corinthians may have been separate from the rest of the text, constituting an individual letter. At all events, in today's passage, Paul is again at pains to answer his critics and re-establish his authority and credibility.

He defends himself against attacks made by more impressive speakers. The tone of the previous verses (12: 1–6) shows Paul at his most personal and passionate. He has no other alternative than to mention *'the extraordinary nature of [the] revelations'* he experienced. One can assume they were mystical visions of some kind.

Jewish tradition saw all ailments, whether physical or mental, as coming from Satan. The exact nature of the 'thorn in the flesh' Paul was given is not known, but even through this God was able to work. Paul did not immediately perceive this and he pleaded three times with the Lord to remove his affliction, but the tense used: 'I have pleaded' indicates an action in the past which is completed.



'When I am weak, than I am strong!'

By now Paul no longer asks the Lord for a cure, for he has understood that weakness, insults, and persecutions make him more dependent on God. It is in this context that he can say his famous apparently paradoxical sentence: *'it is when I am weak that I am strong'*. He no longer relies on himself only, but on God working through him – and that makes him strong.

Gospel Mark 6: 1–6

After a series of miracles around the Sea of Galilee, Jesus returns with his disciples to Nazareth, the town where he grew up. This marks the beginning of a new phase of ministry where the disciples will play a more active role. The same story is also told by Matthew and Luke, although it does not appear in the same place within each Gospel. After initial amazement, similar to that described at the beginning of the Gospel (Mark 1: 21–28), the local people become sceptical and disbelieving.

This is the carpenter, the son of Mary

The Greek word translated here as 'carpenter' implied someone able to work with stone as well as wood. It was considered a low-ranking manual labourer job.

It is very unusual to refer to a man in connection with his mother. A more usual phase would have been 'son of Joseph' (as for example in St John's Gospel: John 1: 45), though this could be a veiled insult concerning the legitimacy of Jesus's birth. Since this is the only occasion in the New Testament where Jesus is described as a carpenter, some scholars wonder if there has been an error in the copying of an original manuscript which might have read 'son of the carpenter and of Mary'.

The brother of James and Joset ... his sisters, too

In the Catholic tradition, the term 'brother' has been understood as 'relation, cousin, kin'. Mark here returns to the theme of the lack of understanding of Jesus's family: see Mark 3:20–21, and Jesus's reply: 'Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother.' (Mark 3: 35)

They would not accept him

This rejection can be seen as foreshadowing the final rejection of the whole people of Israel, leading to Jesus's ultimate death.

A prophet is only despised in his own country

It is interesting to note here that Jesus describes himself as a prophet. The phrase was probably a proverbial expression of the time.

He could work no miracle

Matthew softens the sentence: 'he did not work many miracles there' (Matthew 13: 58). The stress here is on the lack of faith of the people.