

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Sunday
7.07.24
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You would think that, God being all powerful and eternal, those on the side of God would have things go their way. However, here on Earth, this has not been the experience of God's prophets and saints. The readings today deal with this painful reality.

St Paul had a profound conversion experience on the road to Damascus and gave his life thereafter to preaching the Risen Christ. However, as St Paul recounts in the second reading this only led to insult, hardships, persecution and agony. In every way, Paul says he feels weak. Yet Paul realised that God wanted him to know his weakness, because this allowed Paul in his humility to be filled with the power of Christ. So Paul carried on, in his weakness, powerfully witnessing to Christ, right up to his martyrdom in Rome.

In the first reading, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Ezekiel and Ezekiel receives his commission as prophet. But it was not anything humanly glorious, but rather to the same insult and persecution that Paul experienced as he was called on to prophesise to a defiant and obstinate people.

These readings set the scene for the Gospel. Jesus returned to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and preached in the synagogue. Despite the brilliance of his teaching, Jesus' own people did not accept him. They thought they knew him and could not seem to accept that Jesus might be so much more than the carpenter's son.

On his part, Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith and could work no miracles there. Jesus could raise the dead. He could walk on water. He could feed thousands of people with just a few loaves of bread. But, if people had no faith, He could do nothing for them.

And, of course, we know that Jesus would continue to be rejected by his own people despite all the good that he did. After three years of public ministry, Jesus would be handed over by his own people to be crucified.

Many felt crushed by the loss of the Referendum last year. It seemed a just cause in the process of Reconciliation, yet was rejected by the Australian people. We need to acknowledge the feelings of rejection and disappointment – much like the

insults and agony St Paul spoke about – that many First Nations people experience.

However, the time will come when all Australians must continue the journey of Reconciliation. Our deepest identity is that we are sisters and brothers in Christ. We are created, loved and redeemed by God. Our homeland is together with our Father in Heaven. Even now we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Reconciliation is right. It is what God wants. This is our faith and our faith keeps us strong. It gives us direction. And it gives us the knowledge that, one day, God's Kingdom will come.

We are called to be strong in faith, as Ezekiel, St Paul and Jesus were. Each of them suffered terrible rejection, yet their faith gave them the strength and confidence to keep going. Because faith attaches us to God and God's power can be manifest in people of faith.

The themes for today – “Keep the fires burning” and “Strong in faith” are very much related and so necessary for those working for Reconciliation. Being strong in faith is to keep the fire deep within our hearts burning. For it is to retain hope that God's ways, whatever the rejections and insults and agonies, will in the end win out. And faith attaches us to God, so we can continue to know God's love deep within our hearts, which gives us the capacity to love and to forgive even in the darkest of times.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, St Paul writes that we must endure many difficulties before we enter the Kingdom of God. So it was for Ezekiel, St Paul and Jesus Himself. So, it is for us. But God is greater than everything. For those who stay close to God, all things turn out for the good.