

14 (B)

At the beginning of today's gospel the people were captivated by the Lord's teaching but that soon wears off because at the end of the passage Jesus is amazed 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 took to him but then a certain caginess takes over. They were wondering where He got all this wisdom and how these miracles were worked through him. He never went to rabbinical school like the chief priests and Pharisees. After all, He was only the local carpenter's son – so what would he know.

But their caginess 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 three year ministry and his ultimate 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 shine was taken from Jesus's visit when he returned to his home town, 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. 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. But it fell on deaf ears because the Lord's power is often at its best at times like this.

Paul then goes on to make his weaknesses, 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 was consistently undermining him. God can use even the sins of our detractors to boost our spiritual growth and lead us to a deeper humility and greater reliance on God. In St Therese community there was a nun who wasn't the easiest to live with but Therese sought out her company more than the other nuns did. Pope Francis said recently our level of humility will be proportionate to how we react to humiliations or 'put-downs' of one kind or another.

In fact the people of Nazareth may have done Jesus a favour. They would have helped shatter any illusions he may have had of His ministry being 'plain sailing' or 'a walk in the park' and help Him face the ultimate rejection by His own people when they had him crucified. 'Thorns in the flesh' along our road of life can be moments of grace for us too. They will make us humble of heart in imitation of Our Lord himself.