

The theme for our morning's meditation is, 'Varied reception given to God's messengers.' In the OT times God sent his servants the prophets to warn his people and to guide them, in order that they may turn back to him. Israel was chosen as a nation in order that she would be an example for those who were around her and that through her others would get to know who Yahweh was. However, Israel as a nation failed to hear the word of God through his prophets. Finally, God sent his Son Jesus as the ultimate messenger, in whom the fullness of revelation was complete, who too was rejected.

In the OT reading we notice that Ezekiel was one of the messengers that God had sent when they were in exile in Babylon about 587 BC. In this passage, Yahweh describes the disposition of the exiles towards Ezekiel's ministry and their rejection of it. Ezekiel had told the elders of Jerusalem about his visions of the abominations in the temple and the departure of the divine glory – that the presence of God had left them. The people however had rejected his predictions as empty and irrelevant (Ezek 20:49), and he is dismissed disparagingly as a spinner of parables. The members of the community encourage each other to go to his house to receive a message from Yahweh. They were in fact telling one another: "*Come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.*" Even though they were in exile in a foreign land Yahweh was continuing to speak to them and Ezekiel was his spokesperson

Yahweh says, '*My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice. Their mouths speak of love, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.*' (Ezek 33:31-32). The reference to the people as 'my people' makes it sound as though the relationship between Yahweh and his people is well. However, the vast difference between the reality and the façade is described in the following verse. The people's apparent eagerness for a word from Yahweh is belied by a blatant refusal to take that word seriously. They hear the words of God but they do not put it into practice.

The problem with the people is twofold: on the one side the people's presence before the prophet is motivated by a craving for the sensuous and the sensational. Erotic speech (Hebrew-lustful words) is on their lips and he has become for them a singer of sensuous songs. Ezekiel's songs titillate his hearers and offer them temporary satisfaction and like any other addiction they crave for more. He is an entertainer renowned for his beautiful voice and skill in playing the instrument. They keep on hearing God's word but they are not obedient to it.

Secondly, their mouths expressed devotion but their hearts were greedy for unjust gain. They would use any means whether violent or unjust to satisfy their greed. Greed and sensuality are two sins of insincerity. How do we respond to God's word? Is it something that we enjoy listening to, but don't want to obey? Are we taken up by the medium rather than the message itself? The prophet who proclaimed a serious message of repentance and trusting in the Lord is frivolously acclaimed as a showman. By their regular attendance at his 'performances' they sustain the illusion they are a spiritual congregation, eager to hear a word from Yahweh. We too may fool ourselves by attending Sunday services regularly and consider ourselves spiritual while not obeying God's word.

When Jesus came, he was the final messenger of God. He too was rejected and was put to death on a cross, but God raised him up on the third day to vindicate his Son. God has sent his Son Jesus with a message of salvation which comes through our personal faith in him. We are called to respond to Jesus by putting our faith in him. What is your response?

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