

**July 4, 2021 The Passion Within Homily:** If someone were to ask you the question, “When did the historical Passion of Jesus begin? Your response is likely to be “Surely, on the night of Holy Thursday in the Garden of Gethsemane.” After all, the first of the sorrowful mysteries is “The Agony in the Garden.”

But one could reasonably argue that his Passion began in his native place, Nazareth. The people he knew so well, his relatives and friends “took offense at him”. (Mk. 6:3) He met with unexpected opposition and rejection. So if, in the past, you have suffered the pain of rejection, please know that you have one who can sympathize with you in your misery and pain: Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus links his destiny to that of the long line of prophets who suffered abuse and violence because of the unpopularity of their message. The mysterious figure of the suffering servant in the Book of the prophet Isaiah “was despised and rejected by others”. In today’s first reading, Ezekiel is forewarned by the Lord: “I am sending you to the Israelites, rebels who have rebelled against me”. (Ex. 2:3)

In the prologue of John’s gospel, the Evangelist writes, “He came to what was his own but his own people did not accept him”. (Jn. 1:11)

Although he is wounded by their lack of faith, their rejection of him and his mission did not move him to stray from his chosen path. In an unlikely place, Nazareth, the shadow of the cross falls on Jesus. His passion is interior, within.

Those who are called to be prophets will be opposed and likely meet with hostility.

Consider the passion of Pope Paul VI, who reigned as Pontiff from 1963 until 1978, a turbulent period in World history. Two of his teaching letters, “*On Human Life*” (1968) and “*The Progress of Peoples*” (1967), were attacked in the international press. The pope himself was savaged by the media. In a private audience with the American bishop, Fulton Sheen, the Pope confided to him that a night seldom passed that he did not wear the crown of thorns to bed.

Pope Paul faced rebellion in his own ranks of priests and religious. Many priests abandoned their ministry and religious sisters left the convent in staggering numbers. Rejection proved to be painful and debilitating for the sensitive pope. More than once he wept.

But a pope is called to be faithful and not popular.

To be noted is that resistance and opposition so often lead to senseless violence. Recently, in our own Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, T. S. Eliot’s masterful play, “*Murder in the Cathedral*” was performed. Based on the life and death of the English martyr, Thomas Becket, one scene that captured the imagination of the theatergoer was the hideous, brutal killing of the Bishop by the henchmen of the King, in, of all places, his own Cathedral. At one time the closest of friends, Becket ran afoul of King Henry after his appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury. The King chose to retaliate. Such is the fate of the Christian martyr.

As baptized Catholics we are all called to be prophets. The story of Jesus' return to Nazareth can lead us to our own self-examination. Will we accept Jesus and his message or will we take offense and turn away from him?

Jesus was amazed that his own kin lacked faith in him and his works. (Mk. 6:6). Let us pray that we remain steadfast in our faith and not disappoint the One who has called us to be prophets!

Amen.