

January 26, 2025 – Third Sunday after Epiphany

Love vs. Hate by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: Luke 4:14-21

For the past three Sundays, I have been quoting a passage from the Book of Isaiah, which is part of the story of Jesus returning to His hometown of Nazareth. The reading from Isaiah serves as Jesus' blueprint for His ministry, and He wanted His own people in Nazareth to hear this Good News first.

What caught my attention this time is a line near the end of the passage: “The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.” This happened even before Jesus said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” It struck me that even before He spoke these words, everyone’s eyes were already fixed on Him.

I found myself wondering, what was different about Jesus this time? He was the same Jesus, the Son of Mary and Joseph, the same person they had known all their lives. What had changed in Him that made it impossible for anyone to look away?

Let’s not forget that after Jesus read the scripture and declared that it had been fulfilled that day, the people didn’t believe Him. They couldn’t accept that someone from their own town could be anointed by the Holy Spirit or that one of them could be the Messiah. Their disbelief turned into anger when Jesus pointed out their lack of faith, and they drove Him out of the synagogue, even attempting to throw Him off a cliff.

It was not a good day for our Lord. There was a moment when the people in the synagogue seemed to be happy with both the message and the messenger, but very quickly, their feelings shifted from admiration to anger and hostility.

According to the text, it’s clear that Jesus had impressed them with His reading and message. Something had changed in Him—He was ready and eager to begin His mission, and the people sensed it. The truth is, who doesn’t want to hear the Good News? Who wouldn’t want to be freed from the burdens that weigh us down, to have their eyes opened and break the chains of oppression?

That sounds like good news, doesn’t it? And everything seemed fine until Jesus questioned their faith in Him.

Let me tell you, I don't blame those people for not believing in Him. None of them had witnessed the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, telling her she would conceive a child, and that child would be named Jesus—the Son of the Most High. They were not with the angels when Jesus was born, and they didn't hear the angel's announcement to the shepherds: "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord."

They didn't know any of this. So, how could they believe Jesus when He told them that the prophecy of Isaiah, written hundreds of years earlier, was now being fulfilled in Him? How could they accept that the words of Isaiah no longer applied to the prophet but to Jesus Himself?

It's easy to understand why they didn't believe. But that doesn't justify their anger and animosity toward Him, especially to the point of wanting to take His life. There is no excuse for that.

The only explanation I can think of is that there was hatred in their hearts. Instead of love, they carried hate, and that led them to harm the very person who had grown up among them, who had blessed them, and who loved them.

When hatred is greater than love, that's when people begin to lose faith—not only in others but in what they believe. We've seen this before. What happened in Nazareth is an example of this. The very people who came to the synagogue to worship God, to hear His word, to pray, and to show gratitude, quickly allowed their anger to overshadow the love they professed for God and their neighbour.

As was once said: "Sometimes our hate speaks louder in our actions than the volume of our voices that claim love as the grace-filled answer."

This rings true for the people of Nazareth. One moment, they were proclaiming their love and belief in God, and the next, their actions were dominated by hate, overpowering the very love they had claimed.

What happened? How did things change so quickly? It all comes down to what we carry in our hearts. If hatred occupies our hearts, that's what we will give.

This is one thing that sets us apart from our Lord Jesus: There is not a single trace of hate in Jesus' heart. But that doesn't mean we cannot strive to display the virtues He showed.

It's said that "Loving means loving the unlovable, or it is no virtue at all; forgiving means pardoning the unpardonable, or it is no virtue at all; and hoping means hoping when things seem hopeless, or it is no virtue at all."

Despite being mistreated by His own people, Jesus loved them. He died for them. Though they didn't deserve forgiveness for what they did to Him, Jesus forgave them. He never lost hope in them, or in us. How do I know this? Because He died for all of us—those of us who are not always kind to Him in the way we treat others. He forgives us all our sins and continues to have hope and faith in us, even when we sometimes lose hope in Him.

When we say that God is good, it's because God is good. Jesus is good. The Holy Spirit is good. And you and I have been created in God's image, which means we also have the divine virtues that Jesus displayed. Let's find them within ourselves and open our hearts to the One who sets us free, who opens our eyes, who brings us Good News, and who loves us. **Amen.**