

FEBRUARY 5, 2025 FATHER FRANCIS SALASIAR

Imagine for a moment that you are an artist who has poured years of hard work and dedication into perfecting your craft. You have studied the great masters, worked tirelessly to perfect your skills and create something truly exceptional. Finally, after years of effort, you have your first big exhibition. You're excited to share your work with the world but when you invite your family and friends to attend, their response is less than enthusiastic. Some don't even show up. Those who do whisper to each other, "Why is he doing this? He's just a kid who grew up on the block." They look at your work but their hearts are closed, their minds made up. They can't see the past, the familiar. This is a sense of what happens when Jesus returns to his hometown in the chapter of Mark 6.

The opening verses stand in stark contrast to the events captured in the previous chapter. Following the healing of the woman who had haemorrhaged for 12 years, and the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead in Capernaum. Jesus and his disciple team hike off to Nazareth, his hometown. You would think Jesus would have a strong fanbase in Nazareth, particularly when word reached them about calming the storm, liberating the demoniac man, healing the woman who suffered blood loss for 12 years, and perhaps the biggie - raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. But that was not the case.

The people of Nazareth were not big fans of Jesus, they were hard-hearted, and they took offense at him. As he spoke in the Synagogue, Mark tells us that the people were astonished by his teaching. That astonishment turns into offense, which then becomes a barrier that takes them from...the form of unbelief. The reading states that because of their unbelief Jesus could do no miracles except to lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. Jesus often states after the miracle, "Your faith has

made you well." Faith is powerful. But the flipside of faith is unbelief. While faith gives life, unbelief is deadly.

We have so many examples of this in Scripture. For instance, it was unbelief that brought the destruction of all life on earth except Noah and his family. It was unbelief that caused the Israelites to end up wandering for 40 years in the desert, bringing about the death of over 1.5 million. It was Moses' unbelief that shut the door to his personal entrance into the Promised Land. Unbelief will stop God's work in our life. Unbelief will keep God at a distance. Unbelief is so powerful that we can spend the rest of our lives stuck where we are, and never see the supernatural.

This passage reveals the heartbreaking truth about the power of unbelief, and it forces us to examine how often we too fail. And fall into the same trap of dismissing Jesus in our own lives. What we need to understand is that our faith determines our ability to see the supernatural. On the other hand, unbelief blinds us to the supernatural. Sometimes, like the people of Nazareth, Jesus becomes too familiar to us. We grew up reciting the prayers, learning the Bible stories from our childhood, and going to Mass every day or every Sunday.

Often, particularly, the cradle Catholics do not really develop a relationship with the Christ. Rather, we use him as our problem solver. When we are in need, we rush to him. And most of the other times he may take the back seat. So, dear brothers and sisters, the story of Jesus' rejection in Nazareth is not just a historical account, it's a mirror that reflects our own tendency to dismiss or to limit the power of Jesus. Just as the people of Nazareth struggled with unbelief, we too face the temptation to let familiarity, pride, and doubt hinder our relationship with him.

Let's learn from their mistake. Let's not let our familiarity with the gospel rob us of its transforming power. Let us open our hearts to Jesus, recognizing that he is far greater than we can ever fully comprehend. And let us, in faith, invite him to do what only he can do in our lives. Both the miraculous and the everyday. For his glory and for our good.