

‘A prophet is never accepted in his own country’.

My brother – who, I’m very happy to say, arrived safely at Lombok harbour in Indonesia this morning – worked in wood all his life – from secondary school onwards. He is what I could call an artisan. For the last ten years or so he specialized in bespoke handrails and balustrades. After a slight early retirement, he still used to keep an eye on two workshops and quite a few employees; but sailing has always been his passion and he is presently about halfway through a two-and-half year circumnavigation of the globe entirely solo. In spite of this heroically intrepid spirit, my mother, God rest her soul, waited twenty-five years for a wooden clothes-horse and, when she finally got it, technology had advanced so quickly that she didn’t actually need it. It’s always the same: if your son or father or uncle or cousin is a painter and decorator, you’re going to wait for an eternity before he paints and decorates your house. Or if a member of your family is a driving instructor, you’re going to be the last one to get lessons. If someone related to you is a doctor, you’re going to be at the end of the world’s longest waiting-room queue.

There is something of this in what Jesus says in today’s gospel: ‘a prophet is never accepted in his own country’; in other words, it doesn’t happen on your own doorstep. It always works for somebody else. It didn’t ‘work’ in Jesus’

home town. They could not accept him or his authenticity because they knew him as Jesus the carpenter's son; how could someone they knew, someone they watched grow up, have such wisdom, such spiritual charisma? Well, they decided he couldn't.

We always miss what's right in front of our noses. Jesus is present in the Mass, in Holy Communion, in prayers and hymns, in our worship and devotion – of course he is; but apparently not noticeably in the person sitting in front of us whom we happen not to like terribly much. In any case, doesn't the spiritual life, the striving after the things of most significance to our soul, take place in the higher realms, above likes and dislikes and the mundane round of everyday living? Absolutely not. Feeding the soul with God's truth takes place down here, right in front of us; if we can't see that, we're like those friends and neighbours of Jesus who would not or could not recognize his true identity: we miss what's under our noses. Like my brother, who for twenty-five years did not give a thought for my mother's need of a clothes-horse, we miss what's staring us in the face, because it's too close to home. Many people couldn't believe in Jesus simply because he came from Nazareth; Nathaniel, when told about Jesus, said: 'Nazareth? Can anything good come out of that place?'

For us today, it would be like us being told that the Messiah has come again in glory, and when we ask where, we're told: 'Basingstoke'. Yet why shouldn't it be?

What Jesus says in today's gospel presents us with a vision of truth that tells us that the extraordinary is only ever to be found in the ordinary. 'Extra' means 'outside of' – and this is not right. It should be 'intraordinary' because 'intra' means within. There's no such word, of course, but there should be. The extraordinary is only ever to be found in the ordinary. If you look through the eyes of love, even someone making you a cup of tea can be an experience of the presence of God. Sometimes the most unlikely people can teach us the most powerful truths about ourselves and our lives; but in order for the heart to receive this wisdom, we have to put aside an inflated sense of our own importance.

The spiritual life does not involve us looking up all the time – that way, we would only get a crick in the neck of our soul. It actually involves us being aware of what is around us, and finding miracles in our everyday life, on our own doorstep. Our children, families, partners – despite all the many ups-and-downs – how could we not see that they are miracles of love? Our good friends – how could we not know that they are miracles of affection? Think of all the beauty in the world – in whatever it comes to us; how could we not understand that they are miracles of God's presence? Love,

friendship and affection, beauty – all these are manifest on our own doorstep, in our own country; we just have to be a bit smarter than the Nazarenes of Jesus' day: we have to recognize and accept what's right in front of us. And, always, give thanks for it.