

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 8, 2012

... a thorn in the flesh was given to me ... First Reading ... 2 Cor. 12:7

This “thorn in the flesh” is one of the most mysterious and elusive phrases found in the Letters of Paul. Scripture scholars have woven many theories, but no one is sure. Was it celibacy? Those of us who strive to be could sympathize with that. Or was it some physical affliction? Epilepsy? An eye disorder? Stuttering? Homosexual tendencies? All of those have been put forth. But one thing is sure, whatever it was, it was a bother to him

Reminds me of a woman who had a bothersome husband named Oswald. One Christmas, Oswald gave his mother-in-law a cemetery plot.

The next year, he did not bother to buy her a Christmas gift.

When she asked him “Why not?” he replied,

“Well you still haven’t used the gift I gave you last Christmas!”

Oswald on the Boulevard

Another day, Oswald saw his mother-in-law run over by a hit-and-run driver.

Oswald called 911.

The operator asked, “Where are you?”

Oswald replied, “At Eucalyptus Boulevard.”

The operator asked, “Can you spell that for me please?”

“Um ... Never mind! I’ll just drag her over to Oak Street.”

Oswald At Home

After dragging his mother-in-law over to the rescue squad, Oswald was ready for a quiet evening at home with his long suffering wife for whom Oswald was her “thorn in the flesh.”

While reading the newspaper, Oswald came across an article about a beautiful actress and model who married a boxer not noted for his high IQ.

“I’ll never understand,” he said to his wife, “why the biggest jerks get the most attractive wives!”

His wife replied, “Thank you dear!”

If Oswald's wife had to put up with this jerk at home, imagine how much patience Jesus had to have to put up with his kinfolk and neighbors close to home.

Today's Gospel illustrates that. He was there with his disciples and no doubt, being human as he was, he looked forward to a great greeting from the townsfolk. Surely he would have wanted his disciples to meet his friends from home. It did not happen.

Instead their reaction was the narrow one of small-minded people: "Just who does he think he is?" "What makes him so uppity?" "Why he is just one of us!" could well summarize their reaction.

"Where did this man get all this?" they asked. "What kind of wisdom has been given him?" "Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary?"

And so the ancient saying was fulfilled, "The prophet is not known in his own land."

This reminds me of a column in today's Scottsdale paper editorial section. A lady rants about some people not thinking that we Americans are not *exceptional*. *Just who do these critics think THEY are?*

Perhaps that is just what irritated his critics in the hometown synagogue—how dare he think he can preach to US? We already know more than he does. After all, he is just the carpenter's son!"

Well he was that. But he was also much more.

This same attitude of "What do THEY know? We already HAVE all the answers. We watch FOX!" Or "We watch MSNBC!" It is precisely this attitude that polarizes the right and the left in our country. We have nothing to learn from each other, so we dig in and say, "Compromise? Never!"

And the result is we become "thorns in the flesh" — bothers to one another.

It is an old, old story, and it was repeated in the synagogue at Nazareth with Jesus.