

Today's gospel is "the rest of the story" after last week's gospel. Jesus, back at Nazareth, his home town, got up to proclaim one of the readings. He reads from Isaiah about what the coming Messiah would do and then, with the eyes of everybody in the synagogue fixed on him said: "Today, this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

Their first reaction was "Wow!" and "they all spoke highly of him." But their second reaction was "Wait a minute! Who does he think he is? He's just one of us, the son of Joseph, why is he putting on airs?" Then, after he says some things that were quite true, and that they needed to hear, they were provoked enough to want to throw him off the brow of the hill on which Nazareth is built!

My homily last week – which was really good, too bad most of you missed it – but it was about how much the first part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word, is like a Jewish synagogue service – not terribly surprising, since the first Christians were Jews.

Somebody e-mailed me afterwards suggesting that perhaps the rest of the story, which we heard today, was reminiscent of the rest of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the sacrifice of the Cross made present on the altar! Those people were trying to sacrifice Jesus! They wanted to throw him over a cliff!

They didn't get away with it, he, rather mysteriously, "passed through the midst of them and went away." I say

"mysteriously" because he was the focus of the mob's attention. It's not like he could have gotten lost in the crowd because nobody noticed him. His passing through their midst says something, something the gospel of John would put in terms of "His hour had not yet come."

Now, I'm not one of the world's great Scripture scholars but, when I got that e-mail, I thought Luke may well have structured his telling of the story with the structure of the Mass in mind. The gospel writers were always hiding things in plain sight like that! In fact, Luke does something very similar later in his gospel: in the story of a couple of Jesus' disciples on the road to Emmaus. It's after the crucifixion. The reader already knows that Jesus is risen but the people in the story don't, and they don't recognize that he's walking with them. Jesus explains Scripture to them – the Liturgy of the Word. Then, when they stop to eat, he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them – just like he did at the last supper – and their eyes are opened, they recognize him – and he vanishes from their sight! Wait a minute! He vanishes from their sight? He passes through their midst and goes away?! I'm hearing echoes here!

Now, I didn't have time . . . or the skills . . . to subject this idea to a scholarly investigation. Real Scripture scholars might pooh-pooh the whole idea. Or they might say something like "Well, yeah! People knew all about that back in the third century! Where have you been?" But if there's anything to this at all, notice how, once Jesus is recognized, or at least in today's gospel, once tells people who he is even if they don't accept it, he gone. Why?

Well, consider how the Mass works. Once we've celebrated the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the only part left is the sending forth.

And it is a sending forth! Don't miss it, it's really good! It's not that we're done now, let's get outta here and back to business as usual, the idea is to be energized, nourished to go out, together, to do something! The Mass is not primarily about what we get, the Mass is primarily about what we do once we go back out there!

And what we are to do is the Lord's work in the world, the work of love. And we're talking true love here, not a kind of love that's all concerned about the way I feel, it's the kind of love focused on others. It's the kind of love that's patient, that's kind, that's forgiving, that is not rude or jealous or arrogant or whatever. It's the kind of love that gives of ourselves, that sacrifices ourselves as Christ sacrificed himself for us.

It's not the easy, feel-good, kind of love. It can be difficult, thankless, but . . . like Jeremiah, the Lord upholds us. Indeed, he leaves us only in the sense of leaving us to do that work in the world. He trusts us that much.

So, let's commit ourselves to carrying it out, in whatever way we are called to do that right now in our lives. To paraphrase St. Paul, if we come to Mass every Sunday but do not have love it all amounts to nothing.