

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lectionary: 124

Reading 1 - [JER 20:7-9](#)

You duped me, O LORD, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed. All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage is my message; the word of the LORD has brought me derision and reproach all the day. I say to myself; I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.

Responsorial Psalm - [PS 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9](#) - R. (2b) My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.

Reading 2 - [ROM 12:1-2](#)

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.

Gospel - [MT 16:21-27](#)

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct."

Today's readings point us toward the path of true human fulfillment.

This past month the Old Testament readings for Mass have been primarily from the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel, with interspersing's of readings from the books of Kings and Jeremiah. Unfortunately, many Catholics (Christians in general really) are not very educated about the history of the chosen people and even less so about historical context. Our ignorance is lamentable in the sense that the history and living contexts of Israel, their Kings, Judges and Prophets, is so important to gaining a deeper understanding of the Jews of the time of Christ as well as the historical and lived contexts into which Jesus speaks and by which His own life was affected. It is in that spirit that I am continuing to provide these extended texts of the preached homilies and it is hoped that because of the importance of your continued faith formation and education, you read and reflect upon 'the rest of the story' in these extended texts and even take the time during the week to follow the links provided in order to gain an even greater degree of knowledge and understanding.

With this in mind, let's get to know Jeremiah and his mission a little better. He lived in Jerusalem about a hundred years after [the prophet Isaiah](#) and six hundred years before Christ, 640-570 BC. These were the decades before the [Babylonian exile](#) of 588 BC. He was a [Levite](#), having born into a priestly family in the village of [Anathoth](#), a Benjamite town about 3 miles northeast of Jerusalem. When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, he was reluctant to accept the invitation because he was still very young and he didn't know how to speak. But God reassured and comforted Jeremiah by telling him that He would guide and protect him.

Jeremiah began serving as God's prophet during the 13th year of [King Josiah](#)'s reign, and his ministry spanned the reigns of five Kings of Judah: Josiah (640–609 BC), [Jehoahaz](#) (609 BC), [Jehoiakim](#) (609-598 BC), [Jehoiachin](#) (598-597 BC), and [Zedekiah](#), the last king of [Judah](#) (597-586 BC). Over the course of his 40 year ministry, Jeremiah saw the fall of the [Assyrian Empire](#) and the steady rise in dominance of the [Babylonian Empire](#) in the Ancient Near East.

In the first reading it seems that Jeremiah regrets that he was called by God to be his prophet. The message from God that he was called to give his people, led to him becoming an object of people's ridicule. Although there was promised mercy interwoven into his prophetic message, it seemed to him and the people that every time he opened his mouth, he had to warn of violence and disaster coming on God's people. In return he got nothing but insults and derision.

His prophetic mission was to warn the people in the [southern kingdom](#), that if they didn't repent and return to the faith of the fathers, disaster was coming, and soon. "I will do to the house that is called by my Name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out your kinsmen, the offspring of Ephraim". [Jeremiah 7:9-15](#) It is hard in fact, to overstate the significance of what was coming. [The destruction of the Jewish Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC and the exile of Judah](#). Jeremiah was living in Jerusalem when [Nebuchadnezzar](#) (who by then had become king of Babylon) returned to capture the city in 597 BC. At that time Nebuchadnezzar deposed the Jewish king Jehoiachin and installed Zedekiah as his vassal. [2 Kings 24:12,17](#) During Zedekiah's rule, Jeremiah advised the leadership of Judah to submit to Babylonian rule and not to look to Egypt as a political ally [Jer. 2:18,36; 37:7-8](#). Judah needed to accept the fact that its destruction was imminent and inevitable [Jer. 5:15-17](#). As you can imagine it was not a popular message among the people and even less so among the leaders. It's no wonder that Jeremiah is often called the "weeping prophet." Like so many of the prophets whom God sent, Jeremiah was in constant danger of being hurt or killed. But like he said in the first reading, he just couldn't stop speaking the truth even though he was sorely tempted.

There's no doubt that we can, somewhat, relate to Jeremiah in so far as he was often full of fear and had a desire to run away from the mission that God had given. But, we ought to want to overcome those weaknesses

in ourselves. We ought to want to be more like Jesus, who “turned his face toward Jerusalem’, who was fixed on embracing the fullness of his mission even to the point of death.

We can also relate to Peter in his weakness of tending to see things too much according to human wisdom and religious cultural constraints and not sufficiently embracing the vision and will of God which, as Peter experienced, also often confuses us because it can be so confounding of human wisdom as to seem utterly foolish. Some of us can also relate to Peter in the way that, as we see in the Gospel reading today, he becomes prideful of the fruits of God’s grace of spiritual enlightenment which is really a gift of God and ought to be a humbling experience. God had given him the eyes to see the profound truth “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”, but he lacked the fullness of being able to understand the meaning. Instead he assumed too much and it led him to become an obstacle to God’s plan and so, unfortunately for him it led to humiliation, due to a lack of humility.

There is also one thing running through all these readings, through Jeremiah, Peter and Jesus that we find hard to relate to but that we ought to greatly desire. We should be without concern for becoming a fool for Christ or a Jesus freak, in the best sense of those images. We must allow the Holy Spirit to enliven within us what Jeremiah described as “like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.” In order for that to happen, we have to follow the advice of St. Paul as he said, “I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” [Romans 12:1-2](#) In his message during the World Youth Day in Madrid, Pope Benedict XVI urged the young people, “Align your life to the truth, even by making choices that are incomprehensible to the contemporary world.” It is a clear challenge to bring the Gospel to a world that promotes ideas and values that are in conflict with those lived and preached by Jesus.

First and foremost like Jesus, but also following the example of Jeremiah, Peter and the Saints of the Church, all of the missionary disciples of Christ are called to grow in faith in such a way as to not be able to withhold the truth, so as not to be able to quench the fire which the Holy Spirit is tasked with enflaming. Doing so will require charity, wisdom, prudence – all the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. Doing so may not make us popular. Doing so might cost us greatly. However, not doing this will lead to our diminishment as human beings and risk of losing our salvation. We are called to walk the same road as Jesus, wherever it leads: “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.” And, he will walk alongside us.

Let’s also be sure not to get the wrong idea of what answering this call might mean. Jesus isn’t asking us to accept a life of misery devoid of joy and peace. To follow Jesus fully, we must be able to see life as he sees it, we must have that “mind of Christ”. [1 Cor. 2:16](#) This is possible for us because as children of God we participate in the Divine Life, and by grace we can possess that supernatural joy and incomprehensible peace even in the face of the most difficult challenges of our mission.

When we have the mind of Christ, we see our lives in terms of loving and serving others and not in the pursuit of purely self-centered or even family-centered ambition. When we have the mind of Christ, the whole direction of our life changes. Our whole concept of happiness changes. Jesus is calling us not to a life of sacrifice and suffering, although we may have periods of such things, but rather to a life of total love and freedom which enables us to embrace our mission, in Christ.

Today’s readings point us toward the path of true human fulfillment.

Now, let’s return to Jeremiah in order to see in him, Christ, allowing God to help us understand the great continuity of His plan of salvation, up to and including each one of us as well as all those who come after us.

The greatness of Jeremiah lies in his humility and obedience gained through an unwillingness to be overcome by his weaknesses greatly aided by the grace of God. In many important ways Jeremiah prefigured the prophetic ministry of Jesus and his suffering servanthood as 'one like us in all things, but sin' [Hebrews 4:15](#). Especially important for us who live in an age when truth is at the center of all that divides us, Jesus loves us too much to hide the hard truths - even if he knows that we don't always want to hear them, just as Jeremiah could not withhold the saving truth from God's people.

Both Jeremiah and Jesus were "weeping prophets" who lamented over the City of Jerusalem. [Jeremiah 9:1](#); [Luke 19:41](#) They were called to deliver the warnings of God and the possibility of God's mercy, clearly affirming that God's love endures. Although they firmly condemned hypocrisy and foretold disaster they assured the people that their salvation could be found in turning away from sin and back to God with all their hearts. [Matt. 15:8](#); [Jer. 7:9-15](#) but, because of their blindness and hardness of heart, the people misunderstood them and they were persecuted by the people. They were plotted against by the citizens of their own hometowns, [Jeremiah 11:21](#); [Luke 4:28-30](#) and both were rejected by the religious and political leaders of their day. [Jeremiah 20:1-2](#); [John 18:13, 24](#)

Rejected by the secular puppet King of the Jews put in place by the Romans, [Jeremiah 32:2-4](#); [Luke 23:8-11](#) they were falsely accused, arrested, and unjustly beaten. [Jeremiah 37:12-15](#); [Matt. 26:61](#); [27:26](#) And yet neither ever abandoned the Jewish people and both ultimately offered God's comfort and hope. [Lamentations 3:22-25](#), [John 14:1,27](#) Jeremiah and Jesus both preached the *New Covenant* of God that would transform a heart of stone into a heart of flesh etc. [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#); [Luke 22:20](#); [Heb. 8:6-13](#); [9:15](#)

As we have learned, not only from the examples before us in these readings this weekend, but also throughout the scriptures and the lives of the saints, all children of God – disciples of Christ must be willing to take up their own cross and follow Jesus. We must indeed choose to accept this call, but we must also choose the way in which we accept it and we must be realistic. It will come with challenges which can only be overcome by humility and obedience gained through an unwillingness to be overcome by our weaknesses greatly aided by the grace of God.