

Lectionary-based Faith Sharing 22ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year A - August 30, 2020



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord, we thank you for your loyalty and for your love.*

All: We thank you with all our hearts, Lord, because you have listened to our prayers.

Leader: *Lord, we thank you for your loyalty and for your love: when we invoked you, you filled us with courage.*

All: Lord, your love endures forever; I am your work, do not abandon me.

Leader: *Let us invoke the presence of God:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit have instructed the hearts of the faithful grant that by the same Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Though Christ, our Lord. Amen.

First Reading [Jeremiah 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.

Commentary

The prophet makes a confession of his vocation. Most of the vocation stories highlight the disappointment of those who are called: the temptation of abandonment in Moses (Exodus 32), the discouragement of Elijah (1 Kings 19), the disappointment of Jonah (Jonah 4), and now, Jeremiah, in chapter 20. It is especially painful to feel excluded from a community for having reminded them of certain demands or witnessed a special fidelity to God.

Jeremiah's intimacy is exposed. With the most daring image that we may find in the entire Bible, he accuses God of having deceived him, of having seduced him without him being able to do anything against it.

Jeremiah is given a tough, bitter and almost inhuman task: to announce the fall of Jerusalem and Judah. For almost 50 years he walked, side by side in the company of his beloved contemporaries along a route that led inexorably to disaster. The people amused themselves by playing on the edge of the cliff, and the prophet warned them by all means, without rest, since the love he professed for his countrymen was genuine. But they did not want to listen to him but marginalized him, despised him, threatened him and accused him of being a traitor.

He was promised to be with him. He was sent to build and destroy. Until now he had only spoken of destruction, becoming the laughingstock of all, when his words were not fulfilled. Where was the build that was promised? Jeremiah feels disappointed, cheated. In his human weakness he decided to forget Yahweh forever, never to act as a prophet again. And just at that critical moment, when you think everything is resolved, he finds himself trapped between his freedom and the power of the Word. Something takes hold of him, dominates him, conquers him and imposes on him again from within with passion, with the force and heat of a devouring fire.

Jeremiah is at the end of his days and saw that all his prophecies came true, everything that Yahweh had announced to him has happened. Without perhaps realizing it, reflecting before a papyrus, he composes one of the most consoling experience of the divine. He sowed and watered, so that others would reap the fruits. Such are the ways of God.

Reflection

- (1) And you, have you been seduced by the Lord? Have you allowed yourself to be seduced or are you still "hard"?
- (2) It was impossible for Jeremiah to ignore the implications that the call to serve God as his prophet would bring. Do you know of other people who have had similar experiences?
- (3) Have you ever felt the rejection of others for having agreed to serve God?
- (4) Our natural instinct is to avoid any suffering. Do you think it is humanly possible to avoid suffering? Can you identify some good things that come from a sacrifice?

Second Reading [Romans 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.

Commentary

To be a Christian in the world, to function in the world, to learn to live with others, is, therefore, for the Christian, a worship, and a worship to God. The Christian is called to be a "new man." A new man has to live according to that new reality. Not out of obligation, fear or imposition but because he discovers that there is not another choice.

Saint Paul wants us to realize this fundamental Christian situation. We may forget about it or live without having it present. This is why Paul remembers it and exhorts us to conduct ourselves according to it. It is necessary to know the steps that we have to take so that our lives acquire more and more a value and a tone in harmony with the Gospel.

It is not exactly outward behavior, such as lighting a candle, or reciting a novena, or practicing a devotion, or keeping a promise, or even attending Mass. Rather, Paul points out what it is that believers must strive to do to please God: Discover what his will is, and working for making it to happen. That is a way of living as a permanent offering, a flesh and blood offering, a living offering.

Reflection

- (1) What do you think Paul means by "living sacrifice"?
- (2) What is more important: attending, Mass and keeping the commandments or living "as a living offering"?
- (3) What is God's will?
- (4) What does the Lord give you to help you to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind"?

Gospel [Matthew 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."

Commentary

"Deny yourself." The difficulty of this expression lies in the inevitable meaning it has in itself. The usual thing is to explain it and understand it as saying "no" to oneself, as an exercise aimed at disciplining the natural tendencies of the person. But not only in those areas that one chooses but also in those imposed by others. Denying oneself here means putting oneself in line with others, being willing to give up one's own way of life for the sake of others. Denying oneself is, in short, forgetting about ourselves by being aware of others first.

This way of being and living involves harshness and suffering. This is the cross that the text speaks of and that the disciple is invited to carry. A cross that can become as real and physical as that of Jesus, because there are people who, at times, will cause us harm and pain.

A great twentieth-century theologian, Theillard-de-Chardin, wrote to those who complained about the weight of the crosses in their lives dedicated to God: "Perhaps you look badly at the cross and see in it only two crossed logs. Turn to the cross and you will see Jesus nailed by love. Then everything will change its meaning and you will understand everything".

Reflection

- (1) Read Luke 4 (13). This text refers to the temptation of Jesus in the desert. Relate this verse to the second paragraph of this gospel.
- (2) What does it mean to "take up the cross and follow Christ"?
- (3) What does it mean to "lose your life for Christ"? Is Jesus asking that we seek death?
- (4) Comment on this sentence: "How sad it is to reach the end of life knowing much about what will not save you and knowing so little about what is worth at the time of your death!"
- (5) To serve the Lord it is necessary to put aside personal matters from our personal life. Which ones are the things that will cost you the most to leave, or diminish?
- (6) What is the difference between believing in Christ and serving the Lord?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*

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