

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time - A

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Jeremiah 20:10-13

Jeremiah's prophetic career extended from his youth in 626 B.C. to a date considerably later than the ruin of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Thus he witnessed the brief renewal of the covenant people under Josiah; the latter's death in 609 at Megiddo; the obstinate, weak, and futile resistance of Josiah's successors to Babylon; and the continued intrigues by those left behind in the land after the mass deportations in 605, 597, and 586, these intrigues culminating in the murder of Gedaliah, Babylon's representative. After this episode the assassins forced Jeremiah to accompany them on their flight to Egypt.

More than any other prophet, Jeremiah not merely preached his inspired message but lived it too; incurring the hatred and persecution of the anti-Babylonian party throughout his life, and suffering intense personal anguish and conflicts from the part he was forced by Yahweh to play in these events.

Jeremiah's message as a whole is dominated by a four-fold opposition: First, between Yahweh as true God and the false gods; Second, between Jeremiah as the true prophet and the false prophets; Third, between the transforming power of the true religion of mind and heart and the ineffective externalism of the official cult; and Fourth, between Babylon, designated by Yahweh to be his "servant" and Egypt, the beguiler and deceiver. Yahweh is consistently thought of as dwelling not in the Temple at Zion (as He is in Isaiah) but transcendently in heaven, looking down upon the world and presiding over all that it contains from the vast cosmic forces to the most interior thoughts and dispositions of its inhabitants.

Today we hear Jeremiah despairing about his situation.

¹⁰ I hear the whisperings of many: "Terror on every side!"

This was the cry of Jeremiah to the officer in charge of the Temple in Jeremiah 20:4. This cry resulted in Jeremiah being flogged and set in the stocks. The cry is now turned against the prophet in derision and mockery.

Denounce! let us denounce him!" All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. "Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail, and take our vengeance on him. ¹¹ But the LORD is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion.

This confidence has its foundation in Yahweh's promise (Jeremiah 1:8, 19), which the prophet often recalled. In the midst of strong contradictions he keeps his faith in Yahweh's loyalty.

¹² O LORD of hosts, you who test the just, who probe mind and heart, Let me witness the vengeance you take on them, for to you I have entrusted my cause. ¹³ Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD, For he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked!

This verse has often been rejected by scholars as a late doxology but the closing words “from the power of the wicked” is found only in Jeremiah’s writings (Jeremiah 15:21; 21:12; 23:14). The Hebrew word *ebyôn*, translated here as “the poor” has meaning other than sociological; it refers to a pious man, the one who does Yahweh’s bidding.

2nd Reading - Romans 5:12-15

Our reading continues from where we left off last week. Recall that Saint Paul approaches his discussions from the perspective of family covenant, not the legal courtroom. To gain a better understanding of the context of this reading, we will continue on through Romans 6:1.

¹² [T]hrough one person

This refers to Adam. As a result of original sin we are born spiritually dead which leads to sin.

sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned ¹³ for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law.

See Romans 4:14-15.

¹⁴ But death reigned from Adam to Moses,

Saint Paul now begins to discuss three ages: Adam to Moses is the natural period which is represented by the fallen, unhappy family; Moses to Christ is the legal period in which one nation is the example; and from Christ onward is the period of international blessing where all nations are blessed and freed from the Law through the grace of Christ

even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come.

Typology plays an important role in the writings of Saint Paul. Here, he talks about how Christ, the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45), was prefigured by Adam.

“Although through one man’s sin death has passed to all men, Him whom we do not refuse to acknowledge as the father of the human race we cannot refuse to acknowledge as also the author of death. ... In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of paradise, in Adam I died. How shall God call me back, except He find me in Adam? For just as in Adam I am guilty of sin and owe a debt to death, so in Christ I am justified.” [Saint Ambrose of Milan (A.D. 378), *On The Death Of His Brother Satyrus* 2,6]

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the transgression.

Lest the comparison with Adam should seem like an affront to Christ, Saint Paul stresses the surpassing quality of Christ's influence on humanity. The first mode of expressing that superabundance is the manifestation of God's favor far in excess of any mercy that sin might have otherwise evoked.

For if by that one person's transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one person Jesus Christ overflow for the many.

“These words clearly teach that original sin is common to all men, regardless of the personal sins of each one.” [Saint Augustine of Hippo (ca. A.D. 421), *Against Julian, Defender of the Pelagian Heresy* 20,63]

“As infants cannot help being descended from Adam, so they cannot help being touched by the same sin, unless they are set free from its guilt by the baptism of Christ.” [Saint Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 414) *Letter to the Sicilian Layman Hilary* 157]

¹⁶ And the gift is not like the result of the one person's sinning. For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation; but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal. ¹⁷ For if, by the transgression of one person, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one person Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of one person the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of one the many will be made righteous.

From Adam we get a sinful nature, but from Christ we gain a righteous nature.

²⁰ The law entered in so that transgression might increase but, where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. ^{6:1} What then shall we say? Shall we persist in sin that grace may abound? Of course not!

Gospel - Matthew 10:26-33

We rejoin Jesus this week during the first year of His public ministry. He has just commissioned the twelve and is instructing them as they are sent out.

[Jesus said to the Twelve:] ²⁶ "Fear no one.

The ministry of preaching is intrinsically frightening. Only faith in a revealing and judging God can overcome that fear.

Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸ And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.

Gehenna is the term which Jesus uses to refer to the place of eternal destruction. It is also the valley which runs along the southern edge of Jerusalem at the time of Christ. The Hebrew word *gehinnom* means “valley of the son of Hinnom.” The name is probably that of the original Jebusite owner of the property. It became a cultic shrine where human sacrifice was offered (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:2ff; 32:35). Because of this cult Jeremiah cursed the place and predicted that it would be a place of death and corruption.

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge.

The cheapest life in the market is cited; yet God’s providential care extends to it. God knows even when a small bird dies, He is aware of the death of one of His own and He will save the life that endures forever.

³⁰ Even all the hairs of your head are counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

A rabbinic argument technique which compares a light matter to a heavy one. It is used here to overcome fear and encourage the disciples to trust God.

³² Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. ³³ But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.

With the assurance of confidence that God knows and cares what happens, the disciples are urged to confess “in Jesus.” The confession would be the typical confession of the primitive Church that “Jesus is Messiah and Lord.” The reward of confession or denial is that Jesus will accept or disown according to one’s fidelity.