

22nd 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 20:7-9

Jeremiah lived through one of the most troubled periods of the ancient near east. He witnessed the fall of a great empire (Assyria) and the rising of one even greater (Babylon). In the midst of this turmoil, the kingdom of Judah, then in the hands of deplorable kings, came to its downfall by resisting this overwhelming force of history.

Yahweh called Jeremiah to be a prophet to Judah and to the nations in the midst of these political convolutions. His ministry lasted about forty years (627-587 B.C.) And his book testifies that his interventions were numerous. In fact, the last decades of Judah's history required a continual flow of light from Yahweh's messengers; besides Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Nahum, and Ezekiel delivered the word of God. Of all these inspired men, no one reached the stature of Jeremiah in his great sensitivity to Yahweh's love for His people and in his profound understanding of this very people's duty toward Yahweh through the covenant. Thus, Jeremiah's prophetic word is noted for its directness and acuity in stating the true nature of Yahwehism and in denouncing the different religious deviations. The two predominant themes of his message are precisely to define true Yahwehism and to proclaim the imminent wars as punishments of Judah's aberrations.

In 586 B.C. Jerusalem was sacked and the Judean population deported to Babylon. A number of Judeans fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah along with them where, according to Jewish legend, he was stoned to death.

⁷ You duped me, O LORD, and I let myself be duped;

The verb translated as "duped" means "to seduce" and is used in the case of a virgin being seduced by a man in Exodus 22:15. Jeremiah is being very bold in his speaking to God.

you were too strong for me, and you triumphed.

He has been seized – again a word used in the context of sexual seduction.

All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me.

Yahweh has tricked His messenger!

⁸ 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.

According to Jeremiah 1:10, he had been sent to "root up and to tear down, to build and to plant." Until now, his message has corresponded only to the first part of the program and as a result he has

had to face constant persecutions. If he had been able to build and plant, the situation would have been different – he has been seduced.

⁹ 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.

Jeremiah's prophetic inspiration is irresistible. In Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 4:24; 9:3; Isaiah 33:14, Yahweh is said to be a consuming fire. Here Jeremiah applies this imagery to God's word.

2nd Reading - Romans 12:1-2

Today we again continue our study of the book of Romans from where we left off the previous week. Saint Paul writes from the point of view of a pharisee who is well schooled in the scriptures and in covenant theology. He has been lamenting how the Jews have failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, but at the same time rejoicing that the Gentiles serve as the means to bring the whole world to salvation. After all, the Jews are descended from the southern kingdom (Judah) while the ten tribes of the northern kingdom (Israel) were sent into exile in 722 B.C. and never returned; having been scattered among "the nations." The Gentiles are from "the nations" and will serve as the example to bring about the reunification of the descendants of Jacob/Israel, the twelve tribes.

^{12:1} I urge you therefore, brothers,

Saint Paul speaks as an authorized apostle (Romans 11:13).

by the mercies of God,

The plural suggests the multiple manifestations of mercy he has described in chapters 9 through 11.

to offer your bodies

As in a sacrificial setting.

as a living sacrifice,

Christians who strive to do what is right give a cultic sense to their lives. Paul compares this offering to animals sacrificed in the Jewish temple rite, but adds the distinguishing note that their entire offering of themselves is "alive and living" and not as a dead animal.

"Paul pleads with them through the mercy of God, by which the human race is saved. ... This is a warning that they should remember that they have received God's mercy and that they should take care to worship the one who gave it to them. God's will is our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3), for bodies subject to sin are considered not to be alive but dead, since they have no hope of obtaining the promise of eternal life. It is for this purpose that we are cleansed from our sins by God's gift, that henceforth we should lead a pure life and stir up the love of God in us, not making His work of

grace of no effect. For the ancients killed sacrifices which were offered in order to signify that men were subjected to death because of sin. But now, since by the gift of God men have been purified and set free from the second death, they must offer a living sacrifice as a sign of eternal life. For now it is no longer the case that bodies are sacrificed for bodies, but instead of bodies it is the sins of the body which must be put to death (John 8:34-36).” [Saint Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 413-426), *City of God* 10,6]

holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.

It is spiritual worship because it is guided by reason and benefitting a man.

² Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,

Paul regards this age (world) to be passing and imperfect (1 Corinthians 7:31) and he alludes to the rabbinical designation of “this age and the age to come.” Saint Paul teaches that the “age to come” has already begun – the two ages meeting in Christian dispensation. This is why the Christian, although he is in “this age,” must live for God and not be conformed to any other standard.

“The fashion of this world is groveling and worthless, and temporal as well. It has nothing noble or uplifting about it but is wholly perverted. The second part [of the verse] may mean either that we should be renewed, in order to learn what is expedient for us, or that if we learn what is expedient for us we shall be renewed. Either way, God wills what is expedient for us and whatever He wills is by definition expedient for us.” [Saint John Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 391), *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans* 20]

that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.

The Christian metamorphosis is not external (like Christ at the Transfiguration), but inward and internal. This change is effected by the presence of God’s spirit within the Christian.

We obey this command to “offer ourselves” in each Eucharistic prayer when we “Lift up our hearts” – “We lift them up to the Lord.” We are placing our lives on the altar along with the offering of bread and wine – so that our lives, along with the bread and wine, can be transformed by God into something even more pleasing to Him.

Gospel - Matthew 16:21-27

Having heard last week Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Messiah and his (Peter’s) subsequent commissioning as the leader of the Church, Jesus now proceeds to begin to instruct His apostles about what is to happen to Him (His passion and death).

²¹ From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly

Jerusalem is the city where the prophets die (Matthew 23:29-39).

from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,

The three groups which compose the Sanhedrin, the elders were lay leaders.

and be killed and on the third day be raised.

This is seen by some commentators as a reference to Hosea 6:2 although it could also be a precise prophecy of what is to happen to Him. Imagine the disillusionment of the disciples at this point – He has just been revealed as the Messiah and instead of military victory and prosperity, He is speaking of suffering and rejection.

²² Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you."

Peter wants only a theology of grace and glory, a health and wealth gospel; he wants to separate Christ from His cross.

²³ He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me,

Remain a follower; you are not yet ready to lead.

Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Satan tempted Jesus in the desert (Matthew 4:1). Peter is acting like Satan and tempting Jesus.

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me

Be my follower.

must deny himself,

To deny someone is to disown them (Matthew 10:33; 26:34-35). Denial of self doesn't mean renunciation of some optional good; it means that the self is nothing, it has no claims and no value. To deny oneself is to disown oneself as the center of one's existence.

take up his cross, and follow me.

This is not an allusion to Jesus' crucifixion. This horrible death was common in antiquity and the cross was a term for suffering and agony.

²⁵ For whoever wishes to save his life

Avoid martyrdom.

will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world

Acquire great wealth.

and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? ²⁷ For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct.

This is a picture of the rewards of discipleship. The Son of Man acts as judge and the kingdom is His.