

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time – February 2&3, 2019 – Reflection

“They will fight against you but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”

(From the Prophet Jeremiah)

“When the people in the Nazareth synagogue heard Jesus speak to them like He did, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove Him out of the town, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl Him down headlong. But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went away.”

(From the Gospel of Luke)

Before I was ordained a priest, I had a bunch of part-time and summer jobs. I worked in a bingo supply factory. I was a dockworker in Brooklyn. I swam in grease working the grill at McDonald's. I was a cleaning person for an office tower in Worcester. I was a cashier and security guard at a parking garage. I worked in a college library stacking shelves and checking out books. I was a leader of song in a parish in Melrose for a couple of years.

But, my proudest moment came when I worked for that famous New England icon, Friendly's Ice Cream. What could go wrong? How could anything be bad when you had to work around ice cream all night ... yum!

So the first night I was scheduled to work, I had to be in for a shift that began at 6PM. I left my house across town and left plenty of time to get to the job. Worcester was in the throes of a tropical storm. The wind was howling. The rain was falling sideways in buckets. The roads were flooded and downed trees made some roads impassable while stalled cars blocked others. Still, like Noah, I drove on and finally made it to the Friendly's ... I looked like a drowned rat, but at least I was there. As I went into the store, I caught the eye of the manager who had hired me and he beckoned me over. It was three minutes past six and he said to me ... in a none too Friendly manner, mind you ... "If you're gonna be late the first night, I don't need ya ... Friendly's doesn't need ya!" So my career at Friendly's Ice Cream with headquarters in Wilbraham, Massachusetts lasted exactly three whole minutes ... wonder if I'm eligible for their pension plan???

Have you ever been rejected, thrown out as not good enough, dismissed as underperforming, incapable, a screw-up?? Jeremiah was rejected by his own people as a downer and a prophet of doom. They didn't wanna listen to it ... they didn't wanna listen to him! Jesus was rejected by His own townfolk ... they thought He was just too high and mighty for them ... an imposter ... a phoney ... a threat to their way of life.

God knows what it is to be rejected too. Our first parents rejected God's commands, thinking they knew better, they could do better, and they were fired from the Garden. It was Satan who had tempted them ... Satan who had promised them the moon and the stars. When they

fell, was it Satan who picked them up, Satan who loved them? No, Satan despised them as weak, kicked them when they were down, and through all the years of human existence, just kept telling lie after lie, and we just keep falling for it over and over and over.

What does Satan think of us poor dupes? Does he think of us as his army ... as his trusted and beloved advisors? No, Satan thinks of you as his slaves, his minions, his property, his fools. What did He say to Jesus at the temptation in the desert ... all these kingdoms of the world I give You if You would but bow down to me! That's us in those kingdoms ... we're just bargaining chips in the cosmic battle between good and evil. We're just collateral damage, easily thrown away like yesterday's trash.

Jesus sees through the Prince of Lies, sees him for the ugly, selfish, hateful monster that he is. Jesus tells him, "Begone!" You're outta here! You're fired!

And then Jesus went out into the highways and the by-ways searching for you ... forgiving you ... loving you ... giving up everything for you ... calling to you, "Come follow Me and I will make you fishers of men," ... I'll give you a job.

Ya see, He sees something in you ... even if ya show up late!