

Homily Notes for Sunday August 18, 2019, 20th in O.T.

Jer 38: 4-6, 8-10; Heb 12: 1-4; Lk 12: 49-53

1. Summary: To be faithful to the Gospel and the calling of God may well lead to conflict and violence. This may be personal or in the whole society. The central theme of today's readings is that we should courageously live out our religious convictions and principles in our lives, as Jeremiah and Jesus did theirs, being willing to suffer for Jesus and his principles, even if doing so should result in our martyrdom or other difficulties. If no one is ever offended by the quality of our commitment to Christ, then perhaps we are practicing "inoffensive Christianity" and are irrelevant to the salvation of the world.

2. Scripture lessons:

3. Jeremiah, in our First Reading, is presented as experiencing the consequences of the burning word of God within him. Jeremiah's preaching divided the city and incited such opposition that people sought his death. He showed the courage of his prophetic conviction by telling the king that he had to surrender to the mighty army of Babylonian empire to save Israel. The result was that Jeremiah was thrown into a deep, muddy cistern to die for his "treason." Would we have the faith to be firm in this prophetic tradition?

4. Paul in the second reading challenges the Judeo-Christians to stand firm in their faith in Jesus, ignoring the ostracism imposed on them by their own former Jewish community. This is a passage that highlights the role of the treasury of the saints (the great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us). They are to inspire us to "rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us...while keeping our eyes focused on Jesus." A prominent member of that treasury of saints is Jeremiah, about whom we want to learn more today. Jeremiah is the only prophet to have a book called "Lamentations" named after him.

5. Jesus, too, in today's gospel, preaches the word of God which continues to divide families, a word which would lead ultimately to his death. Sometimes it even divides Christians, especially those who hate the Catholic Church. We represent the true Church, the complete Church, the original Church as founded by Jesus. The disruption, division and revolution Jesus and his true followers cause in society by the fire of sacrificial love and the fire of justice is necessary to re-set what's fractured, to put right what's dislocated, to cleanse what's infected. **In other words, the curative pain caused by Jesus' preaching is necessary for the establishment of real *shalom* (peace) of God.** Even though Jesus brings a sword of God's word which causes division, he is the bringer of true and lasting peace. We must make a decision to follow him or not, to share his "baptism" or not. This choice can result in division, even within families.

6. Reflecting with Jeremiah:

Who is Jeremiah? Jeremiah was one of the major prophets of Judah. The northern Kingdom of Israel had been conquered and deported by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. Jeremiah was born of a priestly family about 650 B.C. near Jerusalem. After the death of the righteous king Josiah in 609 B.C., the old idolatry returned. Jeremiah opposed it with all his strength. Arrest, imprisonment, and public disgrace were his lot. Jeremiah saw in the nation's impenitence the sealing of its doom. Nebuchadnezzar first captured Jerusalem in 598 B.C., and carried some into exile. During this time Jeremiah's faith was severely tested. Jer 20:7-13 is one of his bitterest complaints. Here he laments the day he was born and complains about the results of his prophecy. "Lord you have deceived me and I let myself be deceived.

7. Consequences of his prophecy. The Lord told Jeremiah to tell the nation to give in to Babylon in order not to be destroyed. Rather, they cast their lot with the Egyptians. God had revealed to him that if they did not yield to the Babylonians, they would be conquered and Jerusalem destroyed. For this he was persecuted in many ways. His enemies had accused him of treason and had tried to kill him. Think and feel with me the situation of Jeremiah.

"So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the well of Prince Malchiah in the Court of the Guard, letting him down with ropes. There was no water in the well, only mud, and into the mud Jeremiah sank."

8. What would threaten to break our faith in God? Wouldn't that experience be enough to break our faith in God? Imagine yourself being let down into a well! As you go down, the little ring of light gets smaller and smaller. You, like Jeremiah, would be thinking, "Is there any water in the well? Will I drown? Will I starve to death slowly?" Then he hit the mud. First he felt it ooze through his toes; then up his legs, perhaps to his waist. Then they left him to die. How damming to the Jews to have a gentile rescue the prophet of God. Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian. But Jeremiah's faith was as strong as steel. Later, when he was pulled from the well, he continued to prophesy what he knew God wanted him to say. After the final fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, he was taken by "friends" to Egypt, where, according to an ancient tradition he was murdered.

9. How strong is our faith? This is also the concern of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. He was writing to people who were being persecuted. He was concerned that the early Christians have a faith that was strong, trained, tested and disciplined. We may well experience pressure and criticism for our faith and morals.

Pope Francis said in a recent homily that "There can be no dialogue with the Prince of this World (Lucifer)!" One of the consequences of being a follower of Jesus is hatred, it is the hatred of the prince of this world. The world would love that which belonged to it. But Jesus has redeemed us from the world. There can be no dialogue with the prince of this world.

Every day and in every Mass let us let Jesus know on whose side we are. The mark of being with Jesus is obedience to him and his laws. The mark of being on the side of Satan is disobedience and self-indulgence.

10. There are good reasons for conflict and a lot of bad ones. What might be some bad reasons for conflict?

- a. Thinking that I can be neutral.
- b. Thinking that I can follow Jesus and participate in certain acts of sin and evil also.
- c. I am a hot-head and like to fight over things.

11. What might be some good reasons for conflict? Let us remember that if we are on God's side, Evil will come after us. If we are neutral or on the side of Evil, it will leave us alone for a while, but later it will return in a more destructive form. Also remember that the Devil is the Father of Lies, so we cannot trust any promises he makes to us.

Stories of some even local Protestant Christians who seem to have an irrational hate of Catholics.

14. How strong is our faith? Like steel or like straw? What can we do to grow our faith? Demo.

15. What are the issues that most need to be prophesized about but would cause the most conflict?

16. A famous hymn states in an elegant fashion the decision that faces us.

1 Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth and falsehood,
For the good or evil side;
Some great cause, some great decision,
Offering each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever
Twixt that darkness and that light.

3. By the light of burning martyrs,
Christ, Thy bleeding feet we track,
Toiling up new Calvaries ever
With the cross that turns not back;
New occasions teach new duties,
Ancient values test our youth;
They must upward still and onward,
Who would keep abreast of truth.

2. Then to side with truth is noble
When we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit,
And 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses
While the coward stands aside.
Till the multitude make virtue
Of the faith they had denied.

4 Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet the truth alone is strong;
Tho' her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.