

Homily of Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

The persecution of Jeremiah described in the first reading took place before Babylon conquered and destroyed Judah about 587 B.C. King Zedekiah and his princes were in dilemma, either to surrender and pay tax to Babylon or resist and be destroyed. The princes advised Zedekiah to seek alliance with Egypt and go to war with Babylon. Jeremiah advised against resisting and going to war with Babylon. He advised paying of tax to avoid the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. This contrary advice made the princes to seek the death of Jeremiah. They said to the king, "Jeremiah ought to be put to death; he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in the city and all the people, ... he is not interested in the welfare of our people, but in their ruin." Of course, they lied against Jeremiah. With the permission of the king, the princes threw Jeremiah into a well full of mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. Due to the intervention of Ebedmelech, Jeremiah was rescued from the well.

Egypt refused to ally with Judah against Babylon. Babylon conquered Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and carried the people into exile.

The first reading is an example of where people refuse to humble themselves and accept truth but prefer to tell lies, and prefer to kill the messenger of truth. They do everything possible to sink truth into mud. The rescue of Jeremiah shows that truth never remains buried in the mud. Truth will eventually come to light, no matter how long it is hidden. Jesus says, "Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known" (Matthew 10:26).

The conquering of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and carrying of the people into exile show the unfortunate consequences of arrogance, telling of lies and rejection of truth. St. Paul cautions, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

When we are confronted with truth, do we take the path of the princes; that is, reject the truth, tell lies, get rid of the messenger of the truth? Or, do we take the path of Ebedmelech; that is, speak the truth and see that the messenger of the truth is saved?

In the Gospel, Jesus says that his coming will bring division. Jesus appears to have contradicted himself by this statement. How does the Prince of Peace become a source of division? Jesus is the truth. Therefore, division is bound to occur wherever lies are upheld and truth is rejected. Upholding truth brings harmony and unity.

Jesus also says in the Gospel, "I have come to set fire on earth, and how I wish it were already blazing." The Sacraments and the word of God we receive are supposed to set us on fire, the same way Jeremiah was set on fire which made him cry out: "I say I will not mention him, I will no longer speak in his name. But then it is as if fire is burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding back, I cannot endure it!" (Jeremiah 20:9). We can, therefore, see why detractors could not stop Jeremiah from proclaiming the truth.

We are in the type of fire set by Jesus when we are the light of the world and the city on the hill top that cannot be hidden; and when we are a light on a lamp that is not put under a bowl (Matthew 5:14-16).

Then, we are unable to hide the truth.

Then, our good work cannot be hidden.

Then, we are unable to accommodate evil.

Then, we are courageous and fearless witnesses of Christ.

Then, we are zealous in serving God and humanity.

Then, we are people of prayer, praise and gratitude.

Then, we are people of great faith, hope and love.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP