

Homily of Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A

Jeremiah was one of the prophets God sent to prophesy to the people of Israel to turn from their sinful ways or face divine judgment. Jeremiah prophesied that since the people had failed to repent of their evil ways, a foreign power was going to conquer them, take them captives, and destroy the temple and Jerusalem. For such words, Jeremiah was persecuted and was nearly killed. The first reading was a prayer of Jeremiah while he was being persecuted.

The Gospel was Jesus' encouragement to his apostles. He told them to be fearless in proclaiming the Good News. He reminded them that, later on, their proclamation of the Good News would attract persecution. He assured them that they should not be discouraged by the persecution that would occur because their sustenance would come from God.

Violent persecution of Christians is going on in some parts of the world. In those places, Christians are killed, churches are burned, and properties are destroyed. There are places where Christians' rights and privileges are denied them.

Another type of persecution is anti-Christian laws and policies prescribed and promoted by governments, the media, institutions and organizations. Some countries' rulers no longer realize that their countries were founded and built according to Christian principles.

Persecution occurs in families too. Some family members persecute others due to Christian beliefs and practices.

There is a type of persecution that can be called psychological persecution. This is when Christians or Catholics are willfully criticized and mocked for their religious beliefs and practices.

Sometimes people are persecuted for being on the path of truth. Sometimes some ungodly measures are taken to silence the truth, and sometimes individuals pay supreme sacrifice for being on the path of truth.

The Gospel of today and uncountable places in the Scriptures encourage us to stand firm and not be afraid or discouraged in times of persecution. Why, because, fear cripples; it disorganizes; it brings confusion; it destabilizes; it weakens. Fear empowers the aggressor and diminishes the victim. However, we know that persecution brings suffering, pain and sometimes death. How can we remain fearless in such situations? Acts 5:40-42 gives us an example of response to persecution. "After recalling the apostles, they had them flogged, ordered them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus and dismissed them. So they left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. And all long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus." Another encouraging example is from Acts 7:59-60. "As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them;' and when he said this, he fell asleep." These passages have a lot to teach us.

How do we remain unafraid when we are being persecuted?

One: Total surrendering to God: Such surrendering fills the individual with divine tranquility. Such surrendering is very empowering. Psalm 27:1-3 says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I

fear? The Lord is my refuge; of whom should I be afraid? When evil doers come at me to devour my flesh, these enemies and foes themselves stumble and fall. Though an army encamps against me, even then will I trust.”

Two: The battle belongs to God. Do not seek revenge; for Scripture says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Romans 12:19). If we trust God and his word, no need, therefore, dissipating one’s energy and attention, and tiring oneself with holding onto oneself the aggressor’s transgressions. Psalm 118:6-8 says, “The Lord is with me; I am not afraid, what can mortals do against me? The Lord is with me as my helper; I shall look in triumph on my foes. Better to take refuge in the Lord than to put one’s trust in mortals [or in oneself].” Romans 8:31 assures us, “If God is with us, who can be against us.”

Three: Turn to God in prayers. Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). We love our enemies by not seeking revenge. We, rather, pray earnestly for God’s divine intervention. The three young men were spared from the flames of fire because they prayed and sang while in the midst of fire (Daniel 3). Paul and Silas were miraculously freed from chains and shackles while in prison because they prayed and sang (Acts 16:25-34).

Four: Be resolute and unwavering. The three young men’s answer to King Nebuchadnezzar is a good example: “There is no need for us to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If our God, whom we serve, can save us from white-hot furnace and from your hands, O king, may he save us! But even if he will not, you should know, O King, that we will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up” (Daniel 3:16-18).

These four steps, and by God’s grace, will help us overcome every kind of fear.

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