

Homily of Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C, 2022

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; Psalm 71:1-6, 15, 17; 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13; Luke 4:21-30

The first reading tells us about the call of Prophet Jeremiah. God called Jeremiah to prophecy to the Jews at a time many political and religious leaders turned away from truth and from justice, and from God. Jeremiah prophesied the fall of their city to Babylon. The political and religious leaders not only rejected Jeremiah and his message, they tried to kill him. Chapter 38 of the Book of Jeremiah narrates one of the plots to kill Jeremiah: The princes “took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern. There was no water in the cistern, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud. Now Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian, a court official in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the cistern... said to the king, ‘My lord king, these men have done wrong in all their treatment of Jeremiah, the prophet, throwing him into the cistern. He will starve to death on the spot...’ Then the king ordered Ebed-melech, ‘Take three men with you, and get Jeremiah, the prophet, out of the cistern before he dies.’ Ebed-melech took the men with him, ... and they pulled him up by rope out of the cistern” (Jeremiah 38:6-13). It is very pleasing to know that Ebed-melech was an African!

The Gospel reading tells us about the rejection of Jesus by his people. They did not want to hear the message of truth, love, mercy and justice which Jesus preached. They spited him by asking, “Isn’t he the son of Joseph?” Joseph was a carpenter. At that time, carpentry was a trade for the low class people. Then, “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.”

The cruel manner with which the detractors of Prophet Jeremiah and Jesus tried to do away with them, shows the extent of cruelty men and women go to reject and silence messengers of truth and justice. Religious and political histories are awash with several of such examples. However, on our own part, are we humble enough to accept uncomfortable and bitter truth, or do we reject truth and hate and destroy messengers of truth? We are as guilty as Jeremiah’s enemies when we drag people’s names through the mud by saying things in order to destroy their worth or their reputation. We are also as guilty as Jesus’ detractors when we take actions aimed at humiliating and degrading people; and when we take actions to destroy people.

Also, God calls each one of us, as Jeremiah was called, to be prophets of truth and justice wherever we are. However, we are warned in the first reading to gird our loins because, often, messengers of truth and justice are resisted and persecuted. Sometimes, they pay the ultimate price. Even at that, we stand on God’s promise, “They will fight against you but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 1:19).

St. Paul in the second reading teaches us what love is, and what love is not. He says, “Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

This spiritual exercise might be helpful. Let us pray with the above passage.

Lord, I pray that:

*Patience replaces my impatience;
Kindness replaces my unkindness;
Admiration replaces my jealousy;
Humility replaces my pomposity;
Meekness replaces my inflatedness;
Gentleness replace my rudeness;
Selflessness replaces my self-interest;
Serenity replaces my quick-temperedness;
Contentment replaces my resentment;
Compassion replaces my spitefulness.*

Grant that I may have:

*the courage to accept all truth;
the heart to bear all things;
the faith to believe all things;
the confidence to hope all things;
and the strength to endure all things. Amen.*

St. John of the Cross says, “At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love.”

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