

Homily of Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

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 God, from truth and from justice. Jeremiah prophesied the fall of their city into the hands of the Babylonians. 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 the Ethiopian: ‘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).

The Gospel reading tells us about the rejection of Jesus. The Jews did not want to hear the message of truth, love, mercy and justice Jesus preached. They disdained him by asking, “Isn’t he the son of Joseph?” Joseph was a carpenter. Carpentry was a trade that was for the hoi poloi (the common 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 truth and justice and silence the messengers of truth and justice. Religious and political histories are awash with several examples. However, on our own part, are we humble enough to accept uncomfortable and bitter truth, or do we reject truth, disdain and destroy the messenger? Also, God calls each one of us, as Jeremiah was called, to be prophets of truth and justice wherever we find ourselves. However, we are warned by 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.”

The second reading from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians tells us that prophetic message bears fruit in the hearts of those who are rooted in love. St. Paul explains what love is, and what love is not: “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.”

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

Lord, I pray that:

My impatience be replaced with patience;
My unkindness be replaced with kindness;
My jealousy be replaced with admiration;
My pomposity be replaced with humility;
My inflatedness be replaced with lowliness;
My rudeness be replaced with gentleness;
My selfishness be replaced with selflessness;
My quick-temperedness be replaced with calmness;
My bitterness be replaced with delight;
My resentment be replaced with love.

Grant that:

I may have the courage to accept all truth;
I may have the heart to bear all things;
I may have the faith to believe all things;
I may have the confidence to hope all things;
I may have the strength to endure all things.
Amen.

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