

Homily of Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, 2025

Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10; Psalm 40:2-4, 18; Hebrews 12:1-4; Luke 12:49-53

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” (Jeremiah 38:4). Of course, the princes 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. Their plan was a painful death of Jeremiah by starvation or by whatever could kill him in that abyss.

In the first reading, we read how Ebedmelech intervened and Jeremiah was rescued alive from the well. It is pleasing to know that Ebedmelech, a court official, was an Ethiopian. Jeremiah was saved by an African!

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 the truth but prefer to tell lies and prefer to kill the messenger of the truth. It is an example of where people do everything possible to sink the truth into the mud. The rescue of Jeremiah shows that the truth never remains buried in the mud. The 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 the carrying of the people into exile show the unfortunate consequences of arrogance, lies, and rejection of the truth. St. Paul cautions, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

When we are confronted with the 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 save the innocent?

Despite the persecution faced by Jeremiah, he did not relent in prophesying to the people what “Thus says the Lord ...” Jeremiah teaches us that if we are on the path of the truth, we are not to give up but to persevere in the face of opposition and difficulties. The second reading encourages us to “persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith ... [who] endured the cross, despising its shame. ... Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.”

In today’s gospel, Jesus says that his coming will bring division. 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

the truth is rejected. Peace, harmony, and unity do not exist where the truth is rejected. Jesus says, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

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 in 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.

The fire of truth burned in the life of Ebedmelech who was a mere servant. He was fired up to courageously speak to the king about the murderous actions of the princes. The king, who had handed Jeremiah over to the princes, ordered the rescue of Jeremiah. The fire of truth of a servant dispelled the darkness falsehood of the princes.

The fire Jesus sets on us makes us the light of the world that cannot be hidden or put under a bowl. May we let our light shine so that our good works be seen and God be glorified (Matthew 5:14-16). May we blaze from the Fire of the Lord. Amen.

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