

BIBLE STUDY
August 24, 2020

THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jeremiah 20: 7-9

Matthew 16: 21-27

Romans 12: 1-2

1. Jeremiah 20: 7-9

- Jeremiah is a man of sorrows. As a prophet, he has a difficult task to preach an unwanted message that Israel will fall because they have made all the wrong decisions and have not followed or placed their trust in God. Nobody listens to him or takes him seriously. He is a nuisance and is persecuted and punished for being so outspoken. In verses 20: 1-6, he is no sooner released from the stocks when he begins to condemn the chief officer of the temple, Pashur. Jeremiah is driven by an obligation to speak the word of the Lord and it is wearing him down.
- In Sunday's selection (verses 21-27), we listen in on a monologue of Jeremiah as he pours out his soul to the Lord. He is having an interior crisis. The burdens of his ministry as prophet are crushing him. He speaks to God candidly and honestly with a freedom that shows what a close relationship he has with God.
- V. 7: Jeremiah laments that God has tricked him. God has given him a "bait and switch" invitation. Jeremiah did not know that answering the call to be a prophet would be so hard. He describes it as being like seduced. He didn't have a chance because God is so strong. Jeremiah complains that he is ridiculed and insulted by everyone.
- V. 8: Jeremiah says that he has no choice. He has to speak out because he sees violence and outrage and he cannot remain silent because the word of the Lord compels him. The word of God brings him all this pain and suffering.
- V. 9: Sometimes Jeremiah decides that he will not speak out. He will stay silent. But that makes it worse. The word of God becomes imprisoned in his bones and is like a fire burning. The word of God imprisoned within him is worse than speaking out. He cannot stand it.

2. Matthew 16: 21-27

- At the conclusion of last week's Gospel, Jesus commanded his disciples to be silent about his identity as Son of God and Messiah. He did not want them to think that he would fulfill the conventional expectations that the Messiah would be a triumphant figure that would restore the dynasty of King David and free Israel from Roman domination. Verse 21: "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples..." Jesus initiates a long process of teaching and formation of the disciples into the mystery of redemptive suffering.
- Verse 21: Jesus plainly tells them that he must go to Jerusalem where he will suffer, be killed and on the third day rise again. This is totally the opposite of what the disciples expected of the Messiah. The beginning of Jesus' ministry has been very successful with its emphasis on teaching and healing. Jesus was

wildly popular in Galilee because of his healing. Then, Jesus began to argue with the religious authorities and confront them for their hypocrisy and lack of mercy. The handwriting on the wall predicts that Jesus will incur more opposition and outright hostility in Jerusalem.

- Verses 22-23: This is too much for Peter! He rushes to assure Jesus that this cannot be and that maybe the disciples would act to protect and save him. Then, Jesus angrily turns on Peter and calls him Satan! In a few short minutes, Peter had gone from being “blessed” for the revelation he has received from God to now being the devil. Jesus’ response: “Get behind me, Satan!” is reminiscent of the temptations of Jesus when he repelled the devil for enticing him to choose the conventional path of the Messiah for his own comfort and convenience. We can assume that this choice between the conventional Messiah and the suffering Messiah was a real temptation and a struggle for Jesus. The choice was between what God wants and what humans want. Human beings see things differently than God. The first reading from Jeremiah may give us insight into the interior struggle of Jesus.
- Verses 24: Jesus then teaches the disciples about the mystery of the Cross. Now begins a long and painful journey for the disciples to learn about the true mission of Jesus. If they are going to follow him, they will also share in his fate. Maybe not physical death or crucifixion but certainly a portion of suffering that is inevitable in life.
- Disciples must deny self, take up cross, and follow Jesus. **Deny self** means to reject our “false self” of ego, pride, instant gratification, worldly success, popularity and power. Denying our false self allows us to embrace our true self which is what God wants us to do, i.e., to give ourselves away in sacrificial love for others. **Take up his/her cross** means to accept the suffering that is inevitable in life and see that God can transform it into glory. It reminds us of the Serenity Prayer in which we change what can, but we accept what we cannot change—that is another way of saying “take up your cross.” **Follow Jesus** means that we are united to Jesus as we do so. We have the strength and grace to carry our cross because Jesus carried his cross *for us*. This is the heart of Christian faith, believing that God transforms suffering into glory.
- Verse 25: Saving our life means wanting to do our own will—mistakenly believing that we can control our life. It is a futile exercise of pride and fear. Losing our life means that we let go and let God. We trust that God has a plan for our lives and that we need to let him work it out. We balance out taking pro-active and prudent action while opening ourselves to discern what God wants for us. Learning how to balance our initiative and God’s plan is the goal of the Christian life. If we “let go,” then we find true peace and happiness.
- Verse 26: “Life” is not confined to earthly existence but Jesus’ meaning of life is our life that continues into eternal life—the life of our immortal soul. As Christians, we need to have the perspective that our life continues into eternity. We do not want to do anything in this earthly life that would

jeopardize our attaining eternal life. Nothing on this earth can compare to the supreme goal of being in union with God for eternity.

- Verse 27: If this seems to hard or too much to bear, remember when the Lord returns as Judge he will reward those who have made the choice to keep their sights on eternity and not settle for the passing pleasure of this earth. Jesus emphasizes that he will return as Judge not only to punish the wicked but to reward the just.
- Jesus seemed to think ---as many did---that the end would come very soon.

3. Romans 12: 1-2

- Verse 1: Although chosen for its continuing of our reading of Romans, these verses are a complement to the Gospel theme. Paul exhorts us to offer ourselves as a sacrifice to God. That is very similar to denying self. Give ourselves and all our desires and ambitions to God.
- Verse 2: Do not conform ourselves to this present age. Do not settle for earthly goals or reward but hold out for the rewards of eternity. That will require us to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. This is similar to what Jesus says to Peter—you are not thinking as God thinks but as human beings think. To think as God thinks is to experience a renewal of our minds.
- To discern what is the will of God: Discernment is that sixth sense to perceive and know in our hearts what God's plan is for us. It also involves the desire to do not what I want but what God wants. It is the conviction that my true and lasting peace and happiness is not in what I want but in what God wants for me. Discernment comes from years of immersing ourselves in the Gospel so that we learn from observing and meditating on Jesus. We desire to take on his heart and mind. To see what he sees, to hear what he hears, to feel what he feels and to want what he wants.
- The will of God---what God wants for us---what gives God greater glory--- is good and pleasing and perfect.