**Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Jeremiah 38: 4 – 6, 8 - 10

In those days, the princes said to the king: “Jeremiah ought to be put to death;

he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such things to them; he is not interested in the welfare of our people, but in their ruin.” King Zedekiah answered: “He is in your power”; for the king could do nothing with them. And so they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Prince Malchiah, which was in the quarters of the guard, letting him down with ropes. There was no water in the cistern, only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. Ebed-melech, a court official, went there from the palace and said to him: “My lord king, these men have been at fault in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah, casting him into the cistern. He will die of famine on the spot, for there is no more food in the city.” Then the king ordered Ebed-melech the Cushite to take three men along with him, and draw the prophet Jeremiah out of the cistern before he should die.

**Responsorial Psalm**

R. **Lord, come to my aid!**

I have waited, waited for the LORD, and he stooped toward me.

R. **Lord, come to my aid!**

The LORD heard my cry. He drew me out of the pit of destruction,

out of the mud of the swamp; he set my feet upon a crag; he made firm my steps.

R. **Lord, come to my aid!**

And he put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God.

Many shall look on in awe and trust in the LORD.

**Hebrews 12:1-4**

Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,

let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

**Luke 12:49-53**

Jesus said to his disciples: “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

In Our First Reading, while Nebuchadnezzar's final siege of Jerusalem was underway in the last years of Zedekiah, the king implored Jeremiah's intercessions with the LORD, but the prophet informed the royal court clearly that the Babylonian armies would prevail, and destruction and exile were inevitable *(see Jeremiah 37: 1-10).*

During a break in the siege, Jeremiah attempted to go to visit his ancestral property, but he was accused of desertion to the enemy and imprisoned in "the court of the guard" *(See Jeremiah 37: 11-21)*. The princes of Judah were not satisfied with this punishment, as Jeremiah's continued preaching of Judean defeat was demoralizing the people, so they had him thrown into a cistern to die. An Ethiopian royal servant, Ebed-melech, succeeded in gaining the king's permission to rescue the prophet from slow death in the cistern and to place him back in custody in the court of the guard *(see Jeremiah 38: 7-13)*. The king arranged to meet privately with Jeremiah to inquire about the LORD'S word concerning his fate at the hand of the Babylonians, but though warned, the king did not heed or act on the warnings from the prophet *(see Jeremiah 38: 14-28)*.

One of Jeremiah's major contributions to salvation history and Christian theology is his own person as a type of Christ, more so than any other prophet. Biography plays a little role in Isaiah but a large role in Jeremiah. In many ways, the person of Jeremiah the prophet becomes absorbed into his prophetic ministry, such that his own experiences as much as his words become transformed into "prophecy." The Church

has long recognized the striking correlation between the character and trials of Jeremiah and Jesus. Both were:

(1) Chosen from the womb (Jer 1:5; Luke 1:31)

(2) Destined for rejection and conflict with their people (Jer 1:18-19; Luke 2:34-35),

(3) Called to celibacy (Jer 16:1-4; Matt 19:10-12),

(4) Likened to a sacrificial lamb (Jer 11:19;John 1:29,36),

(5) Betrayed by those closest to them (Jer 12:6; John 13:18, 38, etc.)

(6) Preached against the Temple and predicted its destruction (Jer 26:2-6; Mark 11:15-19, 13:1-2)

(7) Opposed and persecuted by the chief priests for their message (Jer 20:1-3; 26:7-9; Mark 11:18)

(8) Condemned to death (Jer 26:8-9; Mark 14:57-58)

In the Responsorial Psalm we are struck by the similarities of David’s experience with that of Jeremiah: **“The Lord heard my cry, He drew me out of the pit of destruction, out of the mud of the swamp; he set my feet upon a crag; he made firm my steps.”**

*(Psalm 40: 2 – 3)*

Remembering God’s faithfulness to Jeremiah, to David, and to us, gives us confidence to cry out to God for help against the obstacles that still confront us**. “Though I am afflicted and poor, yet the Lord thinks of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, hold not back!”** *(Psalm 40: 18)*

Our second reading is a good fit for the themes of the First Reading and the Gospel. The author of Hebrews recalls Christ’s “descent” into the suffering of the Cross and His “ascent” out of that pit of suffering to the right hand of God. In His embrace of and triumph over suffering, Jesus continued the great tradition of the Hebrew prophets like Jeremiah, only in a more perfect manner. We recall Jesus' words from the Beatitudes**: “Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you”** *(Matt 5:11-12).* The phrase **"the prophets *who were before you"*** implies that we, in some sense, have entered into the prophetic tradition; and this is indeed the case. (CCC §783 states: *Jesus Christ is the one whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and established as priest, prophet, and king. the whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them.*) Let's not have a "woe is me!” attitude when we face opposition - even within the Church - for attempting to be faithful to Christ and the successors of His Apostles. If we are alive to be hearing this, we have not yet resisted **“to the point of shedding blood”** *(Hebrews 12: 4).*

In this Gospel, Jesus reminds us that there is a commitment higher than family bonds: the commitment to God himself.

Sometimes the commitment to God and family are mutually supporting. The Fourth Commandment is **"Honor your father and your mother"** *(Exodus 20:12)*. The son who repents of his selfishness and turns to God will be instructed by the Ten Commandments to show honor to his parents and will then become a better son. Likewise, St. Paul commands husbands: **"Love your wives, as Christ loved the Church"** *(Ephesians 5:25)*.

And to fathers: **"Do not provoke your children to anger"** *(Ephesians 6:4)*. So the married man and father who repents and turns to God will be instructed by these verses and become a better husband and parent.

However, there are also occasions where commitment to God, and specifically to Jesus Christ, is in conflict with expectations that family members have for us, and then the resulting conflict is very difficult to bear. However, the truth of the faith and the call of God on one's life are not things that can be negotiated in order to avoid family friction: **“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me”** *(Matt 10:37).*

There are about six million converts to Catholicism in the United States, and many of them had to face the reality of the above and what the Gospel says about households being divided at some point in their spiritual journeys. They lived it when it dawned on them what the reaction to their conversion would be among their non-Catholic family members. Others walked the road toward the Catholic Church and stopped before converting because they were not willing to provoke conflict with their family. Yet conversion to Christ in His Church in the American context is hardly to be compared with the sufferings of those few who have made the journey from Islam. It could cost a Muslim who converts their life from an honor killing from their own family members! The division within families over Christ is not just some past phenomena. It's a current, daily reality.

Conflict within families arises not only because one member desires to follow Christ or enter His Church. Other forms of obedience cause conflict: more than a few young men and women have entered the priesthood or religious life despite the opposition of their parents.

Despite growing up in the same household, different children often embrace (or reject!) the faith to varying degrees, leading to aggravation at family reunions between a sibling who lives all the Church's teachings and their brother who selectively reject the more "politically incorrect" ones.

**All** these forms of conflict need to be borne in union with Christ, who suffered the Cross for us. Ultimately, the family of God trumps the natural family: **"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it"** *(Luke 8:21*).

Salvation history is full of familial conflict that has its origins in differing relationships to God. Cain envied Abel's intimacy with God and slew him. Jacob wanted the promises of the covenant whereas Esau despised them. Joseph's brothers sought to kill him out of offense at his prophetic dreams. Moses' own brother and sister tried to remove him from leadership over Israel out of envy of his prophetic status. And many other examples could be cited, including Jeremiah.

This Sunday's Gospel reminds us that, as good as peace is, Jesus' primary mission was not to establish social peace in this world and in this life. If that had been His mission - and many think it was! - He obviously has failed. Instead, Jesus' mission was to reveal, to those who desire it, the "narrow gate" that leads to salvation (Matt 7:13-14), the Way that is Himself (John 14:6). There is a price too high to pay for peace. That price is infidelity to Christ. So it is good and proper to work for peace in our family, to love our family members, and build "cheerful Christian homes." Nonetheless, we also need to be prepared to endure the strife and conflict that may ensue when we follow the path of truth to its destination, which is the Person of Jesus.