

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 30, 2020 A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving and challenging God, in today's readings you place before us the challenge of carrying the Cross so that we can become more like you. Help us to find meaning in the crosses of daily life. Breathe your Spirit upon us as we share life and your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings speak about the cost of faithfulness. The passion or sufferings of Jeremiah foreshadow the passion of Jesus, which he speaks about in the Gospel. In the second reading, Paul speaks about offering ourselves as a "living sacrifice" to God.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 20:7-9

In the Book of Jeremiah, we find five intensely autobiographical pieces, often called the "confessions of Jeremiah" (11:18, 12:6, 15:10-21, 17:14-18, 18:18-23, 20:7-18). In these so-called 'confessions,' Jeremiah bares his heart to us, sharing with us the cost of discipleship and his struggle with God. They give us an insight into Jeremiah's "dark night of the soul" (a phrase coined by the Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross, to speak about those times when one feels abandoned by God or feels no sense of his presence). The 'confessions' also speak of Jeremiah's personal misgivings about his ability to be an effective messenger of God in the public forum. We are very fortunate to have this intensely personal sharing into the soul of one of Israel's greatest prophets.

During a turbulent time in Israel's history, Jeremiah is called by God to deliver a message that his people do not want to hear. Jeremiah must denounce corruption in the temple liturgy and condemn the people's dabbling in foreign cults, chastise them for their many breaches of the covenant, and castigate them for ignoring the poor. Prophets are not known for their "feel good" messages.

Today's verses open with Jeremiah sharing with us that in his call, he is duped or seduced by God (see Jer 1:4-6). He feels God has 'put one over on him' and he has allowed it to happen. In ways, he feels sorry for saying 'yes' to God.

As a sensitive and caring soul, Jeremiah does not enjoy being the "object of laughter" and having "everyone mock him." But the people beat him up and throw him in a dark dungeon. Being a messenger of God is no fun (at least not for Jeremiah). On the contrary, it only brings him "derision and reproach all day long." All of this leads Jeremiah to consider "early retirement." "I say to myself, I will not speak in his name anymore." But the divine fire received at his call cannot be extinguished. For Jeremiah, the only thing worse than being God's prophet is saying "no" to God's call.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 63A

This beautiful psalm expresses the author's intense longing to be in the presence of God. Most likely, the psalm expresses the thoughts and feelings of Jeremiah on his better days.

SECOND READING: Romans 12:1-2

Having spoken eloquently in chapters 1-8 on what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, Paul now, in chapters 12-13, calls for a moral response. In acknowledgment of God's goodness, followers of Christ are to seek to make Christian values permeate every aspect of their lives. Authentic liturgy is not something that just takes place in Church. Ideally, our *whole life is an act of worship to God*. Offering ourselves to God means conforming to his will and not to the temptations of the world.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 16:21-27

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Matthew 16:21-27

We have here a sequel to last week's Gospel, with Peter once again as the main character. Last week, Jesus *praises* Peter for recognizing him as the Messiah. This week, Jesus *rebukes* Peter for suggesting that he avoid the Cross. Here, the 'rock' becomes "a stumbling block." His remark to have Jesus avoid the Cross puts him in a league with Satan. While Peter recognizes Jesus as the Messiah who is to bring about the new reign of God, he clearly has no idea, or maybe has a false idea, of how Jesus will exercise his mission as Messiah or accomplish the reign of God. Peter has yet to learn that Jesus will not be a regal warrior type of hero, but a humble, suffering Messiah.

Then Jesus goes on to speak about the cost and rewards of discipleship. The disciples must be willing to embrace the crosses of life and die to themselves, i.e., to their false self – proud, vain, self-seeking. Jesus, not oneself, must be the center of one's life. In dying to the desires of the false self, we will discover and grow into our true (Christ) self. The Gospel concludes with a reminder that ahead for each of us is a day of reckoning. Our words and deeds will have eternal consequences. Later in Matthew's Gospel (25:31-46), believers will learn the criteria upon which judgment will be administered.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. Jeremiah felt 'duped' by God. What do you think he meant by that? Have you ever felt that life without your 'yes to God' would be easier?

3. Jeremiah compares his relationship to God as "a fire burning in his heart." What might be an image you would use to describe your relationship with him?

4. In the second reading, Paul tells us that we must not "let our lives be conformed to this world." Can you name some 'ways of the world' that it can be easy enough for Christians to embrace?

5. The 'Covid-19 event' is and may continue to be a big cross for many people to carry. How did it most impact your life?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Be aware of how you are or may be embracing worldly ways. Do what you can to push back against them.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, following you and your ways is sometimes very hard. In those times, help me to feel your strength.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Keep praying especially for all whose lives are impacted by Covid-19.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Jesus,
in the first reading today,
Jeremiah compares his relationship to you to a
'fire burning in his heart.'
Help us to burn with love for you.
Amen.*