

## Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Wed, 06/15/2016 - 20:00

### **Catechist Background and Preparation**

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Jeremiah 20:10-13

Psalms 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35

Romans 5:12-15

Matthew 10:26-33

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word that engages you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### **The Word in Liturgy**

More than those of any other prophet, Jeremiah's writings reveal a wealth of autobiographical insight that allow us to understand the human drama of the man and his calling. His vocation to be a prophet (ca. 627 b.c., during the reign of Josiah) was accepted only reluctantly (Jeremiah 1:6), and with God's assurance of divine protection (1:8). The reality of his life, however, was that Jeremiah endured years of rejection and overt persecution as a result of the unpopular message he was sent to deliver. Today's selection comes from one of the so-called "Confessions" of Jeremiah, an intensely personal outpouring of anguish at a time following his conflict with the priest Pashur, when attempts were being made on his life in order to silence him. The verses chosen for today's reading allude to the betrayal and plotting of those close to him, and give voice as well to the prophet's unshakable conviction that Yahweh will ultimately vindicate him. His confidence in God's deliverance was held up by Christian authors as an image of Jesus' own trust in God and as an example to be followed by Jesus' disciples. Jeremiah's prayer to see vengeance wreaked on his persecutors was replaced, however, by Jesus' call for forgiveness of one's enemies.

Last Sunday, we heard Jesus send his disciples out on mission. His mandate is accompanied by a series of instructions in chapter 10 that should characterize the Christian missionary effort. This week and next, we continue to read from those instructions. Today's text contains a threefold admonition not to be afraid. Reflecting the Matthean community's firsthand knowledge of persecution and even martyrdom, Jesus' words acknowledge the reality that many may meet with death because they are his disciples. Nonetheless, in the spirit of Jeremiah, Jesus uses the homey images of sparrows being watched over and the hairs on one's head being counted by the Father to point out that God's care and providence will sustain his followers. Matthew makes a point of including Jesus' warning that his disciples must witness publicly to him before those who would persecute them. One can understand the pastoral importance of such a warning in the climate of persecution in which Matthew's community lived.

### **Catholic Doctrine**

#### **Persecution and Suffering**

The deprivation and pain involved in mental, physical, spiritual, or emotional suffering is an inevitable part of the human experience. In addition, those believers who stand up for gospel values



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and the message of the kingdom of God may find themselves persecuted for their stance. Meaning, significance, and a transforming purpose can be found in these trials, however, when they are undergone in union with Christ. God does not promise to take away all pain and suffering, yet the affirmation that God is our deliverance is a thread running throughout both Old and New Testaments. The deliverance of God is often experienced as an abiding presence to the faithful in their suffering.

Both Old and New Testament scriptural figures undergo pain and suffering because they are faithfully following God's call, such as the prophet Jeremiah and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. Saint Stephen is stoned to death for his faith in the Christ. Saints Peter and Paul are persecuted and eventually put to death for their devotion to the Son of God.

The history of the early Christian Church too is replete with the example of martyrs who witnessed to the faith through the shedding of their blood. Catholics celebrate this witness even today in the liturgical cycle. Our Church calendar contains feasts and solemnities in observance of the deaths of the martyrs whose blood was the seed of the early Christian community. Through the eyes of faith we see their deaths as triumphs and victories, testimonies of God's love overcoming evil, sin, and the difficulty of human suffering.

The word itself, martyr, in Greek means "witness." This witness to the faith is not limited to the early history of the Church. From those foundational days to the present, martyrs have shed their blood in faithfulness to the God who loves us.

There is, of course, a certain tension involved theologically and existentially, in this contemplation of persecution and suffering when there are so many scriptural texts that emphasize God's providence and protection. However, it is important to note that God is not the author of suffering and pain. Suffering is linked to natural, worldly processes and, in a biblical and theological view, to the misuse of free will resulting in the fall of humanity from its original graced state. Thus, God in Jesus plunged into our human experience and endured what we ourselves endure, that is, suffering and death, in order to offer us salvation. God's mercy holds out to us the salve (from the same Latin root word for "salvation") for our wounded natures. Believers respond to the difficulty and pain of human suffering and persecution by personally appropriating through prayer, sacraments, and Christian solidarity the healing power of Christ's resurrection, understanding that what one suffers may ultimately be redemptive.

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