

22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 30 August 2020

Scriptures: Jeremiah 20:7-9; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16:21-27

Homily: Fr. Ken

Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet to the people of Judah. As prophet, he denounced idolatry and infidelity to their covenant with God, both of which had once again become common practice. For this, Jeremiah was rejected by the people.

The first reading comes from Jeremiah's personal lament about the state of his calling to be a prophet. Jeremiah expresses his frustration with God for seemingly having tricked him into proclaiming God's words, and accepting such a difficult vocation.

Jeremiah also speaks about his frustration at having to endure ridicule at the hands of the very people he is trying to bring back to God.

However, despite all the persecution he has suffered and his mounting frustration with God, he does not withdraw from his prophetic calling. His words, "I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it", are his submission to the power of God acting in him, and the power that God's word will have over those who persecute him.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to suffer. Jesus, the very person on whom all their hopes are pinned, states that his journey will be on the road of pain and death. Despite their protests, Jesus says that is the way it will be. They may not be able to understand now, because human thinking does not always accord with God's will. Later, all will become apparent. After his death and resurrection, and with the descent of the Holy Spirit, the disciples will look on this episode with different eyes.

Jesus makes it clear that to follow him will involve a share in the cross. If the disciples lose their lives for his sake, they will find

the true meaning of their lives. What is important is not material gain or power. Earthly goods and control over others mean nothing. It is only by taking their share of Christ's cross through an honest appraisal of themselves, and recognition and acceptance of their own sufferings, that they can be assured of finding their true selves. To know who they really are requires letting go in order to gain true life.

In so far as the disciples model their behavior on the teaching and example of Christ, they will be rewarded accordingly. Ultimately, Jesus will come to judge all, and that judgement will take into account the extent to which their actions and words have been in accordance with the values of the kingdom of God.

Just as the language of the cross was difficult for the disciples to understand, so it is for most of us.

What today's scripture readings provide is the opportunity to reflect again on the crosses in our own lives. We can ask ourselves whether we accept our crosses and align them with the cross of Christ, or whether we use them as an opportunity to become embittered.

Jesus exhorts us to trust in him, and to allow him to help us carry our crosses as we walk beside him. If we do not do this, our lives can easily be thrown off track. However, if we do learn to accept the Lord's loving help, our appreciation of the Lord walking alongside us will grow and grow. The redemptive quality of suffering will be experienced. It will make us spiritually stronger, and allow us to witness ever more powerfully to the truth of Christ in the world.

If we make the time to sit in silence and reflect, with God's help we can begin to identify the crosses that we carry in our own lives. And then we can begin to accept the Lord's help to bear them. The concerns about the pandemic of COVID-19, the northern California wildfires, employment and work issues, the challenges with family, or the pain of growing older and losing

one's independence, are all examples of crosses which we may be carrying. If we become resentful, it can prevent us from living the fulfilled and loving lives that God wants us to live. If we can accept God's love, walk with God and bear the cross together, it will not only give us strength, but draw us ever closer to our brother, Jesus Christ.