

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 30 January 2022

Scriptures: Jer. 1:4-5,17-19; 1Corin. 12:31-13:13; Luke 4:21-30

Homily: Fr. Ken

Five years ago, in 2017, Pope Francis made an historic, though politically sensitive, visit to Myanmar. Afterwards, he traveled to neighboring Bangladesh. There he met with representatives of the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who had fled Myanmar and who live in the refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Pope Francis said to them: "In the name of everyone, of those who persecute you, those who hurt you, and especially of the world's indifference, I ask for your forgiveness. Forgive us".

And then in a very striking phrase emphasizing their indigenous name—a name forbidden back in Myanmar—he said: "The very presence of God today is also called *Rohingya*."

Recognizing the presence or the voice of God is often something we humans struggle to deal with. Perhaps even more difficult is our daring to speak in God's name, whether speaking God's truth to power, or simply to our contemporaries.

In the first reading from the Old Testament, when God commissions the prophet Jeremiah as "prophet to the nations", God promises to give him the strength and courage he will need to withstand the inevitable opposition: "They will fight against

you, but shall not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you”.

In the Gospel, Jesus’ authority to speak in God’s name is challenged. An initial favorable response gives way to hostility as the people realize that they know this man Jesus and have watched him grow up. How can this son of an ordinary carpenter dare to speak in God’s name? Jesus’ neighbors were unable to see the good—to see the God—at work in him. They could not see past their own prejudices. Ultimately, they could not see the presence of God in the ordinary humanity of Christ. The lens through which they viewed him was warped in such a way that they were blind to the divine and saw only the mundane.

In the second reading, St. Paul offers the Corinthian Christians a different perspective through which to see the world: that is, the perspective of love.

Being a prophet, an eloquent preacher, a person of great knowledge or of great faith—even being a miracle worker or a martyr—is to no avail unless love is the touchstone of our lives. Love is to be the source from which our actions spring, the lens through which we see the world, the means by which we interact with the world, and the goal towards which our lives are heading.

In the Scriptures, we do not have a description of what Jesus looked like. But Paul gives us something much more important: a description of the kind of person Jesus was and continues to be. If we replace the word “love” in Paul’s hymn with name “Jesus”, we get a powerful description of Christ—the core of his being: he is always patient and kind, not jealous or self-obsessed, never

boastful or conceited, rude or selfish, always delighting in the truth, always ready to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes.

Today, for us to be genuine prophets—true witnesses to the presence of God in our world today—then the person of Jesus, love made flesh, must be the foundation stone on which to build our lives, the lens through which to view the world, and the guiding star which leads us on our journey through life.

A challenging exercise would be to replace the word “love” in Paul’s hymn with our own personal Christian name so that we can see the path that we are called to walk: to be patient and kind, not conceited or self-centered, never resentful but always ready to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes. Love does not come to an end. Rather, love is the one sure way to eternal life.

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