

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2010

The riches of human life and its beauty lie in the variety of positions and the diversity of duties people perform in society. Every one of them is an expression of a vocation God has entrusted to each person according to his skills and his abilities.

Each vocation is a task and a mission; it has its joys and its hardships. However, whatever might be the difficulties someone can encounter, God who has given him that vocation will never abandon him. That is what today's readings try to tell us.

The first reading describes the vocation of the prophet Jeremiah. It shows how, in a very mysterious way, God chose him before he was born and even before he was formed in the womb of his mother. God has dedicated him and appointed him as a prophet to the nations. He has to stand up and tell the people all that God has commanded him.

The mission will be not easy because Jeremiah has to face adversity, rejection and persecution. But none of all this will crush him down. Instead God will be with him in everything and make him strong like a pillar of iron. He will protect him against kings, princes and priests. Though those will fight him, they will not prevail against him.

One of the things we learn from this text is the mystery that surrounds our life. Like Jeremiah, God knows each one of us since before we were conceived in the wombs of our mothers. If that is the case, it means that we are dear to God in a very particular way. There is nothing of what happens to us that is unknown to him.

It means also that because we are known to God, each one in particular, no one has the right to underestimate himself or herself for any reason. Even when family, friends and society reject us, we have a guarantee that God will not, because we count a lot for him as his beloved children. All that gives us courage and hope even when things do not seem to work, for the time being, as we would like.

Another thing is that the fate of Jeremiah prefigures the prophet Jesus and the prophetic figures of all ages and, in particular, all Christians who suffer because they try to do what is right. Like Jeremiah, Jesus will be persecuted, but God will defend him and protect him.

As we heard in the Gospel, Jesus was rejected not only by the people of his country, but also by the members of his own family. Although the people from his village were amazed and admired his wisdom and eloquence in explaining the word of God, they closed the doors of their hearts in welcoming him.

For them, Jesus was just the son of Joseph and Mary. They failed to recognize in him the Messiah sent by God for the salvation of Israel and that of the whole world. They not only raised questions about his origin and identity, but much more they wanted him to perform miracles he did in some places.

Sensing all that as a sign of lack of faith in him and, above all, in God who sent him, Jesus reminds them, of course to their shame, that "no prophet is accepted in his own native place". Then, using an

argument of authority, he referred them to what happened in the past to the prophets, Elijah and Elisha.

As a matter of fact, at that time, when there was famine in the whole country of Israel because of the drought of three and half years, the prophet Elijah did the miracle of multiplying the bread only in the house of a widow who welcomed him. In the same way, while there were many lepers in Israel at the time of Elisha, the prophet healed only the foreigner and Samaritan, Naaman, who trusted him.

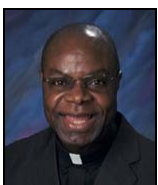
What this Gospel teaches us is, first, that without an openness of heart to someone it is very difficult to appreciate him and what he intends to tell us. What someone is saying might be relevant for our life or our problem, but in so far as we have prejudices, we will never find it interesting or important for us. In the same way, as long as we do not make an effort of opening our heart to God, we will never appreciate his word and see its value for our salvation. The possibility of salvation comes to us when we accept to convert from our sins and prejudices as we listen to the word of God.

Second, all the discussion between Jesus and the people of his village shows us what faith means. Faith is not, first of all, knowing things about God or repeating an ensemble of learned formulas. It is, above all, trust in God and his word that has come to us through the centuries. It is when we take for truthful the word God has addressed us in the Gospel that we create a possibility of salvation. That is why, what counts is not seeing, sensing, touching or feeling, but trusting that what God has said is true. If we can see, sense, touch or feel, we better do it with the heart. After all, one sees well only with the heart, because what is essential is invisible to the eyes.

All that brings us to the necessity of conversion. Today St Paul calls us to convert to the love of God and of our fellows. Without love in our hearts, our vocation and gifts can easily become self-satisfaction and self-justification of our merits. We might have the gift of prophecy, but without love, it becomes a continual threat to people. We might have the gift of knowledge, but without love, it becomes an intellectual snobbery. We might have faith, but without love, it becomes empty. We might have charity, but without love, it becomes patronizing. We might give our body in sacrifice, but without love it, all that becomes an expression of a vain pride.

In its nature, Christian love is patient, kind and happy for what it possesses as gift. True love is more impressed with its own unworthiness than its own merit. It cares more for the interest and the rights of others than for its own. Christian love is glad when the truth prevails and is sad when the wrong doing takes over. Love is supreme, because the one who loves can see God face to face. Great as faith and hope are, love is still greater. Faith without love is empty, and hope without love is simple despair. Love is the fire which kindles faith and the light which turns hope into certainty. Let us ask the Lord to fill us with his love so that, in the fulfillment of our gifts and vocation, we might be enlightened by his divine wisdom and Spirit. May God bless you all!

Jeremiah 1, 4-5, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 12, 31-13, 13; Luke 4, 21-30



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