

## **Twentieth Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013**

The readings of this Sunday talk about the suffering of the servant of God. They warn us about the possible conflict and opposition we will face as we fulfill our commitment for the cause of God's kingdom. They also invite us to remain faithful to God, especially when we are suffering for the sake of God's kingdom.

The first reading describes the persecution of the prophet Jeremiah from the hands of his enemies who wanted to put him to death. They accused him, not only of demoralizing the moral of the soldiers in the country, but also of not being interested in the welfare of his fellows. Though the king gave up to the demands of Jeremiah's enemies by delivering him into their hands, he eventually rescued him and saved his life.

What is behind this text is the idea that persecution and threat await those who trust in God. Another idea is the truth that whatever might be the level of threat they can go through, God will save them. That is why the people of God should never be discouraged when going through difficult times and suffering.

Those who, in spite of suffering, stand firm in their faith are true witnesses and models to be followed by the disciples. That is what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews highlights in the second reading. Those models do not stand alone, but walk in the footsteps of Jesus who was the first to bear the cross for our sake and won the victory. Like him, the disciples have to run the race with the eyes fixed on Jesus who endured such an opposition from his enemies.

This text allows us to understand the stakes in today's Gospel as Jesus warns his disciples about the coming opposition to which they will be subjected because of their belonging to him.

First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' declaration that he has come in order to set the earth on fire. Then, he affirms that there is a special baptism with which he will be baptized and he is expecting it with longing and anguish. After that, Jesus affirms that he has not come in order to establish peace on earth, but rather division. Finally, he shows how, because of him, the members of one family will be opposed and divided one against another.

What do we learn from these readings? The first point I want to bring is the need for the spirit of prophecy for our time. A prophecy is a gift that God bestows on some people he calls by which they have to interpret situations and events at the light of God's word in order to give them an ultimate meaning and open them up to the future.

In that sense, a prophet is often seen as a visionary and a speaker who talks from God. He is the man of God who speaks what God gives him to say to his people. He is the hands with which God touches people, the eyes with which God looks at people and the mouth with which God speaks to people.

In many occurrences in the Bible, the prophet is made by God to be the watcher over his fellows and awakener of conscience. He has to warn his fellows about the imminent danger that can befall unexpectedly on them if they do not change their life. He has to remind them of the right things they have to pursue and the wrong they have to abandon. As such, to be a prophet is a risky business, because people do not like to be

reminded of their faults. That is the reason why the prophet Jeremiah was persecuted, as we heard in the first reading.

Though the prophecy in itself is a gift, the spirit of prophecy can be given to everybody. In that sense, each one of us can be a prophet to his neighbor. That is why we have the duty to protect each other, to warn each other and to help each other so that we may not come to lose our eternal salvation. If that is true, then, we have to remember that what happened to Jeremiah can happen to us also.

What I am saying here is very important, because there is a tendency in each one of us to feel annoyed and even disturbed when people approach us with the idea of correcting us. When it happens this way, people react by pretending that this is their private life and they have to be left at peace.

Of course private life has to be respected at all cost. But it is one thing to interfere in private life and another to try to help a fellow on serious matter that involves eternal life. That is why we have to be opened to the truth and allow the spirit of prophecy to be operative among us so that we become helpers of one another.

The last point I want to bring is about the conflict born out of faith. As a matter of fact, once we believe in God, we put ourselves into possible conflict with people, especially those who do not share our convictions. This has happened many times in human history and will happen again.

For that reason, we have always to remember that faith is a challenging business. It challenges us as individuals so that we adapt our life to the criteria of God's kingdom. It challenges also people around us who do not see things with the same vision as we do.

That is the reason why Jesus considers his coming into the world as the bringing of the fire. He comes to purify the world of its sins, and build it anew. He comes to shake up the life of people so that they abandon their life of the past and turn to God. As everybody is shaken up, there is more tension than peace. With all that in mind, we understand why Jesus speaks of disputes and oppositions even with the close members of our families.

In practice, it means that when, in fact, we meet opposition or division, we should not be surprised. However, in spite of possible conflicts born out of faith, we should always be respectful of the members of family who do not share our convictions. We should love them as Jesus did with us regardless of our sins. That is the only way we can live together and grow in our own faith. Let us pray, then, for those who suffer because their children have abandoned the Church and do not share their faith anymore. Let us pray for ourselves that our eyes might always be fixed on Jesus, the master of our faith, in everything we do. God bless you all!

**Jeremiah 38: 4-6, 8-10; Hebrews 12: 1-4; Luke 12: 49-53**



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