

Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

JER 20: 7-9

ROM 12: 1-2

MT 16: 21-27

Jeremiah's lament in the first reading should resonate with our experience of living the faith amid a sometimes difficult, confusing and hostile culture. That feeling of being "duped" or "tricked" into something because we didn't know at the start that it would be this difficult.

I doubt many parents think about the demands of living the faith when they present their children for baptism or when we receive our First Communion or even when we are Confirmed. We are drawn to the beauty of our faith or the traditions that are filled with rich meaning and symbolism or we act out of some obligation because "this is just what we do."

On Friday, I had the honor and privilege of celebrating a Nuptial Mass for a wonderful young couple. Though only their immediate family were able to attend due to the pandemic it was a glorious event. For us Catholics, it doesn't really matter if there are 30 people or 300 people at a wedding because the liturgy is exactly the same for both. However, there are always unique and special moments that stand out from one wedding to the next. For example, when the groom caught sight of the bride walking down the aisle with her father he was overwhelmed with emotion and started to cry. He didn't even try to hold back the tears. It really caught my attention and even I got a little choked up. And the bride had such a beautiful voice. She sang all the hymns and all the parts of the Mass (the groom sang along with her) which, quite frankly, is rare. Normally the bride and groom are too nervous or too wrapped up in the moment to engage in the liturgy this way but not these two they sang their hearts out! And, another part of this wedding that really stood out, was that both sets of parents have been married for a long time—between them there were 91 years of committed married love!

These are the things we love about our faith. The moments when God reveals his glory to us and we are caught up in it in a real and powerful way, but, whether we admit it or not, there are also challenges. Jeremiah recognized this when he says, "the word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all day." And St. Peter, in the gospel, cannot imagine that the Lord—"the Son of the living God"—would ever have to suffer and die in Jerusalem or anywhere else for that matter.

Perhaps Jeremiah thought that being a prophet would be easy and people would be jumping up and down to hear his message of repentance and conversion and welcome him into their towns with open arms. Yeah, right! And maybe Peter was too blinded by the miracles he saw Jesus perform—changing water into wine, feeding 5,000 people with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, calming the sea during a storm, and the

Transfiguration on Mount Tabor—to think of him as a suffering servant or the sacrificial Lamb.

We are fortunate to be part of a tradition of faith that is meaningful and beautiful but our faith is not meant just for our admiration nor as a backdrop for photographs when we receive the Sacraments. Our faith is meant to be lived and lived in the world. This has always been a challenge and it will continue to be a challenge because the message of the gospel is radical. It causes discomfort when it is authentically lived because it demands everything from us. We must deny ourselves and take up our cross.

If we don't feel that discomfort then we have to ask ourselves; Have we compartmentalized our faith? Are we just going through the motions? Or are we living it at all? In order to live our faith St. Paul tells us, in the second reading from his letter to the Romans, that we must offer our "bodies as a living sacrifice." "Do not conform yourselves to this age," he writes, "but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect."

Despite his frustration and exasperation Jeremiah admits that even though he would like to never speak the name of the Lord again and hold it in, when he does this then it becomes like a fire burning in his heart, imprisoned in his bones. "I grow weary holding it in," he says, "I cannot endure it."

My brothers and sisters, we must resist the urge to hold in the fire of our faith and accept the challenge to live it openly and honestly even when it means we might be rejected or ridiculed. Our world needs to hear the message of the gospel—a message of sacrifice, reconciliation, charity, and the respect and dignity that ALL human persons deserve, including the unborn. We need to resist the temptation to think of our faith as a postcard or in terms of the pretty things we like or based solely on what we "get" from it.

Instead, we need to feel that fire burning in our hearts that calls us to live what we know to be true despite the challenges and the difficulties we will inevitably face. This is how we will be judged...not by just loving our faith, but according to our conduct and how we *live* the faith we love.

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