

22nd Sunday In Ordinary Time Cycle A (September 3rd, 2017)

Jeremiah 20:7-9

When Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet, he was told that he was being sent to “root up and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant.” However, as he began preaching he found that the word of God at that time was constantly a word of doom because the nation had rejected God and was sliding head long into ruin. Nobody likes that kind of prophecy, so after serving the Lord for over 40 years, Jeremiah found himself constantly rejected, attacked and mocked.³ He was regarded as a meddler and a traitor. Common people, nobles and kings alternately tried to put him to death. They did not want to hear the truth from him, because the truth would convict them of their sinfulness.¹ Their outrage against the message is directed at the messenger. This passage is a prayer of complaint to God, spoken in the third person suggesting the prophet’s inability to look in God’s face and say these things.² He is so upset by the treatment he has been receiving that he tries to stop preaching, to quit being a prophet, but the power of God’s word is so strong that he can’t hold it in.³

7You duped “Duped” means that he was seduced or deceived.⁴ **me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed.** (A more literal translation is: “You seized me and you prevailed.”⁴ **All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me.** Jeremiah is considered “out of date,” “not in the mainstream of today’s theology,” and “old fashioned.” He becomes a laughingstock of the countryside.¹

8Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage is my message: the word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day. What Jeremiah prophesied was often pretty unpopular among the wealthy and Judah’s political and religious authorities. He prophesied that Judah’s people, particularly its leaders, had sealed everyone’s doom by their idolatry and injustice to the poor and powerless. Babylon will come for them all. Who can bear to hear someone say that one’s family, friends, livelihood, home—all one has ever known—will perish in “violence and outrage”?¹⁰ Whenever he became weary of trying to hold it in and would decide to preach what the people wanted to hear, he could not do it because the call to truth was the call of God and he could not turn away from that call.¹

9I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, So why did Jeremiah not simply keep his mouth shut?² The prophet’s answer is that *whether* he speaks, as well as *what* he says, is simply not up to him.¹⁰ When he would not proclaim God’s Word because of the constant rejection, his whole body would constrict and his heart would become like a burning fire.¹ **I cannot endure it.** Jeremiah ultimately discovers that it is not flight from the unfaithful world that gives him comfort, but rather, attentiveness to The Word of God.¹ He finds that he can endure his pain far more easily than he can resist the summons to speak on God’s behalf.²

Romans 12:1-2

*After 11 chapters discussing God’s saving action on our behalf, Paul now exhorts the Romans to **respond** to what God has done. They are now to offer sacrifices to God—not sacrifices of animals but offerings of themselves. The basis of this is found in the sacrament of Baptism whereby all of us have been made priests of our lives “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” We do this especially by offering ourselves along with Christ in the Holy Mass.⁷ There is also the Morning Offering which is meant to be prayed first thing in the morning, consecrating the day to the Lord.¹¹ The first two verses of chapter 12 open with three appeals to the Roman Christians: (1) they ought to offer themselves in living sacrifice to God; (2) they ought not reflect their culture (rather they should shape it); (3) they ought to let God transform them through his Spirit.¹²*

1I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, This refers especially to the mercy mentioned in the last chapter whereby God offered salvation to both the Jews and the Gentiles in spite of the many obstacles man puts in His way.⁴ **to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,** In the New Testament Christians are clearly called to offer sacrifices to God—no longer sacrifices of animals, as in the Old Law, but offerings of themselves.⁷ Sacrificing the body means putting to death the deeds of the flesh so that our members can become instruments of righteousness. This would include pursuing virtues associated with the body such as chastity, temperance, etc. St. John Chrysostom explains that the body is made a sacrifice when the eye looks at nothing evil, the tongue says nothing filthy, and the hand does nothing lawless. More than this, the hand must give alms, the mouth must bless the one who curses, and the ear must listen to the reading of Scripture.⁵ **holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.**
2**Do not conform yourselves to this age** The reason is that worldly wisdom and values are often deformed. God’s Will should be the central object of our discernment, for it alone is acceptable and perfect. Christians must allow God to transform their very selves into the image of Christ.⁵ Baptism confers the grace of purification from all sins but the baptized must continue to struggle against temptations and disordered desires.⁶ (CCC 2520) **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.** By prayer we can discern “What is the will of God” and obtain the endurance to do it. Jesus teaches us that one enters the kingdom of heaven not by speaking words, but by doing “the will of my Father in heaven.”⁶ (CCC 2826)

The worship Paul describes in these verses is in glaring contrast to the idolatrous worship described in 1:18-32. Believers engage in rational worship, the idolater in irrational. Believers offer the body to God in sacrifice, idolaters dishonor the body through sexual immorality. Believers strive to renew their minds with truth, idolaters only darken their minds with error. Believers discern the divine will, idolaters spurn the divine will in preference to their own. For Paul, the difference between pagan and Christian worship is the difference between a degrading spiritual free fall and an ascending spiritual sacrifice.⁵

Matthew 16:21-27

This passage follows immediately after last Sunday’s gospel reading. Now that the disciples recognize Jesus as the Messiah, he begins to prepare them for his rejection, his death and his resurrection.³

21**Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem** Jerusalem is the city where the prophets die (Mt. 23:29-39).¹⁵ **and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,** These are the three groups which compose the Sanhedrin. The elders were lay leaders.¹⁵ **and be killed and on the third day be raised.** This is the first prediction of the Passion.¹³

22**Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.”** The way that Jesus will achieve our salvation will be far different from what generations of faithful Jews have expected. He will not be a conquering warrior in any traditional sense. He will not restore the kings of Israel and usher in the messianic age by conquering Israel’s enemies. Instead, he will die for his people. He will conquer death itself, and he will do so to save all the nations. This sounds like defeat and disgrace to Peter.² Here his natural instincts object to a suffering Messiah. On his own, he cannot see the spiritual necessity of Jesus’ Passion for sinners.⁸ The revelation of Jesus as Messiah was more easily received than the revelation that the Messiah must suffer, die and rise.⁴

23**He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle** The word used here means anything over which one stumbles and falls. Throughout the New Testament it is used as a metaphor to designate something that makes faith difficult.⁴ **to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human**

beings do.” Shortly before this Jesus said “Blessed are you, Simon” for Peter’s words were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Here, by admonishing Peter to “Get behind me, Satan” he reproves him for something said from Peter’s own human spirit and getting behind Jesus may imply that Peter should follow him and his example.³ Jesus is telling Peter to remain a follower as he is not yet ready to lead.¹⁵

²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, The “denial of self” does not mean the renunciation of some optional good, as the phrase is commonly used; it means the affirmation that the self is nothing, that it has no claims and no values. The phrase is echoed in Paul’s saying that Jesus emptied himself.⁴ To deny oneself is to disown oneself as the center of one’s existence.¹⁵ The essence of sin is self and the only way that we break the bondage of sin is to die to self. It is in this dying to self that the saving of one’s life happens. To die for Christ is very noble; to live for Christ is much harder!¹ take up his cross, and follow me. Jesus’ challenge to “take up his cross” follows his first Passion prediction. He indicates that suffering and self-denial are central to the Christian life. Before his Passion, the cross symbolized shame and rejection, afterward it symbolizes the glory of Christian martyrdom.⁸ St. Rose of Lima wrote: “Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.”¹⁴

²⁵For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. We must gamble this present life in order to attain eternal life. Our problem is that we tend to measure God by our satisfaction and not ourselves by His.⁹

²⁶What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? Every person has to bear in mind the Last Judgment. Salvation is radically personal for God will repay every man for what he has done.⁹

²⁷“For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct. This refers to the Last Judgment when Christ will gather all the nations and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left...And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”⁶ (CCC 1038)

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (2) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers Year A” by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers Year A” by Lawrence E. Mick, (4) “Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (5) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (6) “Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (7) “The Navarre Bible: Romans And Galatians,” (8) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (9) “The Navarre Bible: St. Matthew”, (10) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers Year A” by James L. Weaver, (11) “Wikipedia” Free Online Encyclopedia, (12) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Romans” by John J. Pilch, (13) “The Gospel of Matthew” by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (14) Online: Catholic Fire: Saint of the Day: St. Rose of Lima for August 23, 2006, and (15) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.