

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, October 28th, 2018

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Jeremiah, who was called as a youth and who prophesied for about 40 years, has a justified reputation as a prophet of doom. Today's selection is not typical, and it should remind us that for all Jeremiah's dark words, he was nonetheless God's intermediary in heralding the ultimate restoration of Israel, the end of exile, and the return to the land of promise.² The time that preceded this song was miserable. The Israelites are returning from exile—a time of national shame as well as personal anguish. But Jeremiah is announcing a new exodus, a time of deliverance and regeneration, a time of promises fulfilled, a new page in their history. Only someone who has suffered greatly could rejoice as fully as these verses command.⁵ This chapter is based on the promise that Israel will relive its experiences of earlier times, when it enjoyed the love and protection of God, its father and shepherd, as it made its way through the wilderness to find tranquility in the promised land. In today's verses, Jeremiah prophesies that the people will return home rejoicing at the goodness of God.¹

7Thus says the Lord: shout with joy for Jacob, Equivalent to the name Israel as a designation of the people. **exult at the head of the nations; proclaim your praise and say: the Lord has delivered his people, the remnant of Israel.** The remnant is the small number of those who have escaped the calamity of 721, (the year the north collapsed and the people were taken into exile in Assyria) and who have been purified through the exile to constitute the new Israel, faithful to her God.⁵

8Behold, I will bring them back from the land of the north; This refers to Assyria or Babylon, where they have been held captive, and it was considered to be the ends of the earth.⁴ **I will gather them from the ends of the world, with the blind and the lame in their midst, the mothers and those with child;** Jeremiah here envisions a triumphant procession of God's chosen people, returning from bitter exile and reentering the fertile and peaceful land that was their birthright.² None will be left behind, no matter how difficult it is for them to travel. This caravan of weak people will be a sign of the miraculous nature of the event.⁵ **they shall return as an immense throng.** There are three symbols that show that the restoration will be even greater than the Exodus: the number of captives becomes an immense throng, the "brooks of water" which infers that they are constantly flowing and not just an occasional spring (Moses struck the rock for water in Ex. 17:1-7) and the level road (Moses took them over rough terrain.)

9They departed in tears, (when they went into exile) **but I will console them and guide them; I will lead them to brooks of water, on a level road,** A God of compassion leads them, a God who is partial to the weak and so provides them with a level road. It is a God who is "father," exhibiting the special love he has for his firstborn.² **so that none shall stumble, for I am a father to Israel,** God proclaimed Israel his son at the time of Ex. 4:22. **Ephraim** In the early historical books, Ephraim appears as a large and powerful tribe, perhaps the largest. This is a poetic designation for the Northern Kingdom. **is my first-born.**

Hebrews 5:1-6

This letter was written to Jews and attempts to prove that Jesus is both the Messiah and God. It is full of Old Testament quotations proving the validity of the Christian claims about Jesus to this Jewish audience. So why all the discussion about the priesthood of Jesus? Because the Jews held that only a male from the tribe of Levi could be a priest. Since Jesus was of the tribe of Judah he could not be a priest, especially not a High Priest, according to the Law! Therefore the author has to justify his claim—the

Christian claim — that Jesus is the new and permanent High Priest who offers a new sacrifice at the Cross and a New Covenant at the Last Supper. The problem is, if Christ fulfills the Law and God's plan, why is it that his claim to the priesthood violates God's Law for the priesthood? The author's response is subtle but brilliant. He acknowledges that Jesus' priesthood is not in the order of Levi. It is rather according to an older order of priestly office, the order of Melchizedek. Before the idolatrous worship of the golden calf when the Levites were the only tribe to remain faithful to God and were thus ordained to serve God, the priestly duties were carried out by the first-born sons of every family. It is interesting and not accidental that the Levites replace the first-born after the worship of the golden calf. In fact, the golden calf is thought to have represented the Egyptian god Apis who was worshiped in a fertility cult honoring first-born sons. In other words, the first-born priests committed idolatry and apostasy against God by worshiping the golden calf and thereby lost their priesthood to the Levites who remained faithful. Now we can see how Melchizedek fits into the picture for he preceded the Levites by hundreds of years. (It is interesting to note that Jewish tradition held that Melchizedek was a title for Shem, Noah's righteous first-born son.) Thus we see that Jesus holds an older priesthood, which predates the Levitical priesthood. He derives his priestly authority from the fact that he is the eternal first-born Son of God and because of this he is a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek."⁶

Brothers and sisters:

1Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. After the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., there was no place for the priests to offer the sacrifices, and without sacrifices the priesthood of Israel ceased to be important. Their position disappeared and that of the rabbis came to the fore. Without a sacrifice there is no point to a priesthood.⁶

2He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness **3**and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people.

4No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God, Today a person may feel called by Christ to the priesthood but it must be confirmed by nomination by the proper authority—every priest must be under the jurisdiction and receive his ordination from a bishop—and have the official consecration of ordination (CCC 1578.) Every bishop in the Catholic Church can trace his ordination back to the Apostles, the first bishops of the church⁷ (CCC1555.) **just as Aaron** (In Numbers 17:16 the Lord told Moses--who was not a priest--to get a staff from each of the twelve ancestral houses and lay them down in the meeting tent in front of the commandments. There the staff of the man of God's choice would sprout. It turned out to be Aaron's for it not only sprouted and put forth shoots, but also blossoms as well and even bore ripe almonds! **was.**

5In the same way, it was not Christ who glorified himself in becoming high priest, but rather the one who said to him: "You are my son: this day I have begotten you";

6just as he says in another place: (Psalm 110:4) "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." There was a war between 9 kings: 4 were foreign and 5 were from the promised land. The 4 won and took Lot and all of his family. Abram gathered 318 men from his own household and rescued his nephew, Lot. Then Melik (king), of zedek (righteousness), whom we call by the title Melchizedek, who was not only a priest of God Most High, but also the King of Salem, (Jeru salem) came out and blessed Abram. He offered bread and wine (not the usual animal sacrifice) and thus became an Old Testament "type" of Christ. Jesus, the new high priest and king, offered bread and wine—his Body and Blood-- in the same place (Jerusalem).⁸

Mark 10:46-52

46As Jesus was leaving Jericho Located six miles north of the Dead Sea in the Jordan Valley, about 18 miles from Jerusalem, Jesus had just been in the city for a brief time with Zacchaeus.⁹ with his disciples and a sizable crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind man, Blindness, which was so common at the time and in the country of Jesus, has become an allegory for the common condition of being without faith, without wisdom, without mercy, without joy.¹¹ the son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging.

47On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, son of David, This title refers to the messiah who was expected to be a descendant of King David and the rightful heir to his throne. Many hoped he would possess the power to heal sickness and exorcize demons, much like the original son of David, King Solomon (Wisdom 7:20). The blind man sees Jesus’ messianic identity more clearly than most people in Mark’s Gospel. St. Bede writes that Bartimaeus signifies the Gentile nations saved by Christ. Jesus bids them to rise up from their spiritual blindness, throw aside the mantle of their sinful habits, and follow him down the road to glory.⁹ have pity on me.”

48And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, Note the sheer persistence. “Son of David, have pity on me.” God uses our trials and hardships as a means to bring us to call out to Him. Our present pain is often, as Mother Teresa has said, simply the tender caress of God’s love drawing us closer to Him.

49Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you.”

50He threw aside his cloak, The cloak had been spread out before him to collect alms so when he threw it aside, he threw aside his former way of life.¹¹ sprang up, and came to Jesus.

51Jesus said to him in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied to him, “Master, I want to see.”

52Jesus told him, “Go your way; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he received his sight It is the faith of Bartimaeus in the “Son of David” that brings him into the light. This image struck the early Christians so much that they called those catechumens who were preparing to receive Baptism “those who are coming into the light.”⁶ and followed him on the way. He followed Jesus, not just up the road, but on the “way” to Jerusalem and a new way of life.¹¹ He began with need, went on to gratitude and finished with loyalty, a summary of the stages of discipleship.¹⁰ Bartimaeus, as the last disciple to join Jesus before he goes to Jerusalem and the death that awaits him, becomes a kind of icon for all those Gentile believers who as latecomers to the way of Yahweh follow the “Light of the world” and about whom it was said that “the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.” The story of Bartimaeus gives us part of one of the simplest and most beautiful Christian prayers, the Jesus prayer. It is actually a combination of the cry of Bartimaeus, the hymn from Philippians 2, and the prayer of the repentant tax collector in Luke 18:13: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”⁶

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets,” (2) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2005” by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 1991” by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (4) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 1997” by Lawrence E. Mick, (5) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (6) The Commentary Notes of Tim Grey and Sean Innerst, (7) “Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (8) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (9) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark,” (10) “The Gospel of Mark” by William Barclay, and (11) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2005” by Aelred R. Rosser.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled this commentary.