

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

This reading is composed of the first and last portions of the account of the call of Jeremiah to the ministry of prophecy.¹ He was born in 622 BC of a priestly family in a little town near Jerusalem. In 621 BC a book of the law was discovered in the Temple and it became the basis of a religious reform. Called at an early age Jeremiah heartily supported the reforms under King Josiah who was killed on the battlefield in 609 BC. Jeremiah heartily opposed the old idolatry, which then returned. He was arrested, imprisoned and publicly disgraced. Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 BC.⁸

4The word of the Lord came to me, saying:

5before I formed you in the womb I knew you, This is saying that before a person is born or even conceived, God knew them. He thought about each person and then planned for them.² After Jeremiah, it became an accepted idea that God himself forms the young child in its mother's womb; the significance is that God knows man and stands as his unique master from the very first moment of his existence.⁴ This is part of the background for the Church's consistent teaching against abortion. The Didache, which is the teaching of the Apostles, says that: "You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish."⁵ before you were born I dedicated you, Jeremiah is set aside by God for his prophetic mission. But notice that first God knew him and then he called or appointed him. a prophet to the nations The prophet's mission is universal, that is, beyond his own people. This is a parallel to the same thought in today's gospel.³ I appointed you. Some say that Jeremiah was as young as 19 and others say that he was in his early 20's when he was called or appointed.⁸ There are many examples in the scriptures of being chosen in the womb (John the Baptist and Jesus, of course, and several figures in the Hebrew scriptures as well.)³

17But do you This is not a question, it means, "therefore." gird your loins; Literally, this means to put on your clothes but here it means to prepare for work or battle.⁴ stand up and tell them all that I command you. The message comes from God. Be not crushed on their account, as though I would leave you crushed before them; God will sustain him. God insists that Jeremiah must not back off for He will strengthen him, making him as strong as a walled city, a pillar of iron or a wall of brass.¹

18for it is I this day who have made you a fortified city, God has made him stronger than Jerusalem whose destruction he will announce. Its pillars and walls would crumble BUT HE WOULD NOT for he will stand like: a pillar of iron, a wall of brass, against the whole land: Jeremiah will stand against the whole land because of the difference between the way of the people and the way of God. against Judah's kings and princes, against its priests and people.

19They will fight against you This refers to his own people, the people of Judah. but not prevail over you, The prophet will ultimately prevail over the resistance of the people. for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord. God gives Jeremiah two promises: He will be with him and He will deliver him. The idea of God's presence with his people is as old as the Covenant promises themselves. The idea of deliverance has also been a constant element in the covenant language of the OT. When tribal chiefs in the ancient Near East made covenants with one another they would promise to redeem, ransom, or rescue (deliver) one another if captured by an enemy. God used the same familiar language with his people in promising to deliver them from their enemies. He renews that promise here with Jeremiah.⁶ All of us have been anointed prophets (priests, prophets and kings) by our Baptism.⁷ (CCC 1241) God is "with us" for Jesus is Emmanuel (God with us) and the Church goes forth in

great hope and joy (even though, according to Wikipedia, there were more martyrs for the faith in the twentieth century than in all the previous centuries combined) that is rooted in the belief, in the promise, of God's final victory. Each Christian has a specific purpose in life. Some are anointed by God or appointed by God for a special kind of work. Remember, if God gives you a job to do He will provide all you need to do it! If God has given you a job that is not very special in the eyes of the world, seek to fulfill the mission of all believers, which is to love, obey and serve God in all that you do or say.²

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

While God's name is not mentioned in this reading, go through it once substituting the word "Christ" for "love." In this letter Paul is trying to show the Christians at Corinth who were impatient for additional charismatic gifts, jealous of what others received, inflated with pride over their gifts and rude to those who had no apparent gift, that their squabbles are all meaningless when measured by the one thing necessary: Love. It must be the gauge by which all our activities and energies are measured.³ It is also the ingredient that makes the real unity of the Church possible.⁶

Brothers and sisters:

31 Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit which contribute most to the goal of the Church rather than being spectacular in themselves.⁹ Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well.⁷ (CCC 800)

13:1 But I shall show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in human and angelic tongues By way of emphasis St. Paul speaks of the tongues of angels as the highest degree of the gift of tongues.⁹ but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. These are lifeless instruments and their sound, though clear, is a dead sound. The same occurs in the speech of someone who has no charity; no matter how brilliant it be, it comes across as something dead, because it is of no help as far as meriting eternal life is concerned.⁹

2 And if I have the gift of prophecy, and comprehend all mysteries This means to know all about God. and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

3 If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Strictly speaking, martyrdom is the supreme act of love. Here Paul is referring to external gestures, which seem to betoken detachment and generosity, but are in fact mere appearances.⁹ This first section is on the uselessness of any spiritual gift without love, for it is the true measure of all charisms and is superior to all the virtues.

4 Love is patient, (because it bears serenely the injury it suffers)⁹ love is kind (because it is sweet to all and it repays evil with good) Kindness is inclined to do good to others.⁹ It is not jealous, (because it covets nothing in this world)⁹ it is not pompous, it is not inflated, (It yearns only for spiritual reward and it is not carried away by external things. It thrives only on the love of God and neighbor and avoids whatever would take it from the path of righteousness.)⁹

5 it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, (nor does it have to have its own way)⁹ it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, (It does not let itself have any desire for vengeance, for no matter how difficult a time it may have in this life, it hopes for greater rewards in the next)⁹

6 it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

7It bears all things, believes all things, (love lies at the very source of all Christian virtue)⁹ hopes all things, endures all things. This second section describes love. In the English language in today's world we often confuse lust and love. Lust is directed inwardly and is utterly selfish while love is giving and directed outwardly toward others.²

8Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. The charismatic gifts will expire when the Lord comes again in glory to reveal himself to the Church "face to face."¹⁰

9For we know partially and we prophesy partially,

10but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. Each of God's other gifts is designed to help man reach perfection and eternal beatitude but love IS blessedness itself. Partial knowledge of God and prophecy will be overwhelmed by seeing God face to face. Love of God will not disappear but will increase.⁹

11When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. The charismatic gifts are transitory and meant for this world. There will be no need for them in heaven just as a man has no need for the toys of his childhood.⁴

12At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, Corinth manufactured mirrors of polished bronze. Although known for their excellent quality, their reflected images would nonetheless remain hazy and indistinct. Our present perception of God is similarly imperfect.¹⁰ but then (in heaven) face to face. Life in heaven will consist of a clear and direct vision of God "as He is."¹⁰ At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.

13So faith, hope, love remain, These "theological" virtues come directly from God and they enable us to live in relationship with him. They are infused in us along with sanctifying grace.⁹ these three, but the greatest of these is love. Love outshines the other divine gifts because it outlasts them.¹⁰ In this third section Paul contrasts love's lasting nature with prophecy, tongues and knowledge. When we come face to face with God, we will not need these other gifts, but love will remain. St. Basil gives us a further insight: "If we turn away from evil out of fear of punishment, we are in the position of slaves. If we pursue the enticement of wages, we resemble mercenaries. Finally if we obey for the sake of the good itself and out of love for him who commands, we are in the position of children."

Luke 4:21-30

This story follows Jesus' baptism and 40 days in the desert.

21Jesus began speaking in the synagogue, saying: "Today this Scripture passage This was part of last week's reading and refers to Isaiah. is fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus teaches that this prophecy, like the other main prophecies in the Old Testament, refer to him and find their fulfillment in him. Thus the Old Testament can be rightly understood only in the light of the New.¹² The time of salvation is already being achieved in the person of Jesus.⁴

22And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" People naturally considered Jesus the offspring of Joseph, unaware of his virginal conception by the Holy Spirit. The Nazarenes were skeptical about Jesus' credentials and felt he was unqualified to inaugurate Israel's national liberation.¹¹

23He said to them, "Surely you will quote me this proverb, 'Physician, cure yourself,' and say, 'Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.'" This town was about 23 miles from Nazareth and in the Synoptic Gospels it is the center of the activity of Jesus in Galilee. Matthew states that Jesus established his own residence there and began

his public ministry by teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum on the Sabbath. This town was the scene of the healing of the centurion's servant, the healing of the man with the palsy and of the payment of the temple tax. Actually, most of the incidents and discourses of the first part of the Synoptic Gospels occurred in or near Capernaum, although the name of the city often is not mentioned.⁸

24And he said, "Amen, I say to you, "Amen" would ordinarily respond to the speech of another but the Gospels show Jesus validating his own speech beforehand which is an unmistakable sign of prophetic awareness.¹³ This phrase always introduces a solemn declaration uttered only by Jesus in the gospels (31 times in Mt., 13 times in Mk, 6 times in Luke.)⁴ **no prophet is accepted in his own native place.** Jesus places himself in the company of the OT prophets, many of whom were rejected and even killed by fellow Israelites. In light of this history, Nazareth's rejection of Jesus would seem to give more credibility than not to his prophetic claims! He is also demonstrating that it is not a hometown that judges a prophet but the prophet who judges his hometown!¹¹ The prophet who announces a message acceptable to the Lord is not acceptable.¹³

25Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years (no rain) and a severe famine spread over the entire land.

26It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon (Phoenicia).

27Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." The time of Elijah and Elisha was one of the most exciting in salvation history. There were more miracles (8 for Elijah and 16 for Elisha) and mighty events in the time of these two prophets than at any other time in the history of Israel, except that of Moses. They lived during dark times when God looked unfavorably upon the northern kingdom of Israel where these prophets spent most of their time and prophetic power rebuking their own people for their idolatry and lack of faith, and God sent blessings to the Gentiles instead. In these stories Jesus demonstrates that it is not a hometown that judges a prophet but the prophet who judges his hometown.⁶

28When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. The remarks of Jesus stung the people of Nazareth because Jesus was saying that non-believers were more interested in God's good news than they were. He implied that they needed to enter into a deep state of repentance and even accused them of being as unbelieving as the people of the northern kingdom. They were angry that the message wasn't just for them. Jesus is not acceptable in his own country because his mission extends beyond his own country.²

29They rose up, drove him out of the town, The rage that fills those who hear Jesus' words stems from their complacency.³ Rosser identifies it as the sin of presumption. According to the CCC there are two kinds of presumption: either man presumes upon his own capacities, hoping to be able to save himself without help from on high, or he presumes upon God's almighty power or his mercy hoping to obtain his forgiveness without conversion and glory without merit.⁷ (CCC 2092) **and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built,** This fulfills the prophecy of Simeon when he said that "This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed..."¹³

30to hurl him down headlong. Nazareth was built on a hillside and a short distance from it to the southeast was a wall of rock about eighty feet high which drops about 300 feet to the Plains of Esdraelon. It is there that tradition places the scene where they attempted to cast him off.¹⁴ **But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went away.** Jesus does not take

flight but withdraws majestically, leaving the crowd paralyzed. As on other occasions men do him no harm; it was by God's decree that he died on a cross when his hour had come.¹²

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick, (2) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (3) Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004" by Aelred R. Rosser, (4) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (5) "The Treasury Of Catholic Wisdom: The Didache" edited by John A. Hardon, S.J., (6) Commentary Notes of Tim Gray and Sean Innerst, (7) "Catechism of the Catholic Church," (8) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (9) "The Navarre Bible: Corinthians", (9) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians" with Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of LUKE" with Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (12) "The Navarre Bible: ST LUKE," (13) "The Gospel of Luke" by Luke Timothy Johnson, and (14) "Life of Christ" by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

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