

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Psalms 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

Rev. Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C.

The Garaventa Center

The University of Portland

In our first reading, the Prophet Jeremiah tries not to prophesy. The Lord has given him a word to speak, but Jeremiah resists. He is determined to remain silent. He says to himself of the Lord, “I will not mention him. I will speak in his name no more.” It doesn’t work. Jeremiah complains, “But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.”

The Church teaches that Jesus Christ is prophet, priest and king. By virtue of our baptism, each of us shares in this threefold office. In the words of *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church, the faithful, by baptism “are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ” (paragraph 31). So, we all have some prophet in us. It is reasonable to ask, then, whether we recognize Jeremiah’s experience. Have we felt the burning fire imprisoned in our bones that results when we do not share the Word we have been given? If we have, what accounts for the feeling?

We might find part of the answer in Pope Francis’s Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*. In that extraordinary document, the Pope urges all Catholics to open themselves up to an encounter with Jesus every day. When we do so, the experience of being infinitely loved will fill us with joy. When we share that joy with others, we are carrying out the mission of the Church. Pope Francis argues that sharing the joy

we have experienced should come naturally to us. What is your first reaction when you see a beautiful sunset? You immediately look around for someone to share the experience with. You long to tell someone how marvelous it is. In fact, if there is no one to share the moment with, your own experience of it can seem somehow impoverished or incomplete. When we fail to share our gospel joy we might have an analogous feeling of impoverishment, and an insight into Jeremiah's anguish.

For further insight let's turn to our Gospel reading. The Cross of Jesus Christ affords us our deepest insight into the mystery of God. In faith, and in our lives, we know something of that precious, saving mystery. But even if we were another Dante or Shakespeare, we could not find words to sufficiently plumb the depths of the mystery of the Cross. If we feel something of the anguish of the prophet, it may be because of our inability to articulate adequately what we know. The wisdom of our Gospel is that even if there is nothing we can say, there is something we can do. We can deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow him. Then our very lives will witness to the mystery. By our actions, we will share our joy.