

12th Sunday In Ordinary Time, Year A

Jeremiah 20: 10-13

Jeremiah and Jesus have always been identified with each other because of their sufferings at the hands of their enemies and their confidence in the face of such trials.¹ Today's reading is from the beginning of the fifth and final "confession" which comes immediately after the story of his beating and imprisonment in the temple guardhouse. He loudly and forcefully proclaimed the message God had put within him, but he got back no applause or appreciation, only hatred and persecution and people's laughing at him. This last may have been the worst trial of all, since he was a shy man by nature, who did not consider himself a great speaker; and who was very sensitive to anything he considered unfair or unjust. (2) However, he made an act of trust in God despite the harassment he was suffering and that is our selection for today.¹²

Jeremiah said:

10 "I hear the whisperings of many: 'Terror on every side! Jeremiah has shouted this phrase so many times that it is now thrown back at him in derision and mockery as a nickname!³ Denounce! Let us denounce him!' All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. The very people he trusted turned on him and made fun of him, wanting to stop his proclamations.² 'Perhaps he will be trapped; The irony here lies in the reversal of roles. Jeremiah had pointed out the deceptions and hypocrisy in so many areas of their lives, now they search for the slightest weakness on his part.² **then we can prevail, and take our vengeance on him.**' This is not a case of paranoia, for Jeremiah made numerous enemies during his career, from false prophets, to wealthy and powerful citizens of Jerusalem, to members of the king's court. Jeremiah preached that Judah would be destroyed and its people led away captive if the poor did not receive justice and God were not rightly honored.⁴

11 **But the Lord is with me,** When the word of the Lord first came to Jeremiah, God promised: "Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you." His confidence has its foundation in that promise. He knows that he has nowhere to turn but back to Yahweh in trust.² **like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion.**

12 **O Lord of hosts, you who test the just, who probe mind and heart, let me witness the vengeance you take on them, for to you I have entrusted my cause.** In this prayer he pours out his heart to Yahweh.

13 **Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has rescued** This gives praise to God for the rescue as if it had already occurred, a strong indication of the prophet's trust.¹⁵ **the life of the poor** These are not the physically needy so much as the humble who look only to God for their support. These are the pious people, the "clients of Yahweh." These "poor" are the faithful who are more often among the oppressed than the oppressors because they seek to do God's will rather than make personal gains.³ **from the power of the wicked!"**

Romans 5:12-15

Brothers and sisters: As we look at this reading, it helps to understand that at man's creation, there was complete order and harmony --in Adam himself and --in his relation to God and --to Eve and the rest of creation. This perfection was enhanced by *preternatural gifts* whereby he was freed from sickness, suffering, and death.⁶

12Through one man sin entered the world, Sin invaded the world through Adam. It shattered the harmony and order in man and it also brought about the withdrawal of the preternatural gifts: man now knew sickness, suffering and death. In addition, the human intellect was darkened by ignorance, the will was weakened in its pursuit of good, and the emotions were infected with a strong inclination to evil. Human control and restraint were shattered,⁶ harmony with creation was broken and the union of man and woman became subject to tensions.⁷ (CCC 400) Man lost the grace of original holiness.⁷ (CCC 399) **and through sin, death,** God warned Adam that death was the penalty for disobedience. His willful defiance in the face of this threat brought about the immediate death of his soul and the eventual death of his body.⁴ **and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned**—As the father of the human family, Adam turned away from God. His rebellion was thus a representative act that not only injured himself, but dragged the entire family of man into suffering and separation from God. The Council of Trent appealed to this verse when it defined the doctrine of Original Sin in 1546. The doctrine holds that all descendants of Adam are born into the world in a state of spiritual death and in desperate need of salvation. The condition spreads, not by *imitation* (making the same mistake as Adam), but by *propagation* (by virtue of our genealogical link with Adam).⁴ It is contracted, not committed.⁷ (CCC 404) That is why the Church baptizes even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin.⁷ (CCC 1250)

13for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law. Both the commandment imposed by God on Adam and the Mosaic Law given to Moses threatened the one who broke the law with death. However, between Adam and Moses people continued to sin against the *natural law* written on every person's heart but the *natural law* did not bind under pain of death. The people during this period of time did die which tells us that their death was not due to their personal sins but to *original sin*. The Fathers of the Church add that this was also proven by the fact that some people die before reaching the use of reason.⁵

14But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come. This one who was to come was Jesus Christ. We are linked to Adam by flesh and blood but we are linked to Christ by faith and the sacraments.⁵ St. John Chrysostom observed that just as all who descend from Adam inherit death, though they do not eat from the tree themselves, so all who are joined to Christ inherit righteousness, though they do nothing to produce it themselves.⁴

15But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ

overflow for the many. According to St. Augustine, these words clearly teach that original sin is common to all men, regardless of the personal sins of each one.¹³ The ultimate meaning of the sin of Adam can only be understood in the light of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We must know Christ as the source of grace in order to know Adam as the source of sin.⁷ (CCC 388)

Matthew 10:26-33

We rejoin Jesus this week during the first year of his public ministry. He has just commissioned the Twelve and is instructing them as they are sent out. (13) In verse 17 he has just told them to “Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles.” Now he tells them not to be afraid.

Jesus said to the twelve: This is not just a message of personal encouragement, it is the sending forth of God’s chosen prophets to do his work in the world. Their persecution will be the external mark of their faithful discipleship.¹¹

26“Fear no one. Here, as well as in verses 28 and 31, Jesus attacks the fears that could cause them to abandon their mission.⁹ **Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known.** A day will come when everyone will come to know the whole truth about everyone else, their real intentions, and the true dispositions of their souls. They may be misrepresented by those who resort to lies out of malice or passion but these hidden things will be made known in time.¹⁰ The kingdom of God will inevitably come and the hypocrisy of their opponents will then be revealed.⁹

27What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. The Apostles are now to speak out clearly. Housetops were the highest points in a city from which voices could carry from place to place. Jesus’ teaching is intended from the start to be public property.¹⁶ The saying does not imply that Jesus taught a secret doctrine, but simply that the number who hear his teaching from his own lips is much smaller than the number who will hear it from the disciples.³

28And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; One thing the Christian martyr does know is that he is more than just his body!¹¹ Men can impose suffering and death on the body but they cannot force spiritual death on the soul. Jesus uses this distinction between body and soul to contrast the relative value of earthly life with the absolute good of eternal life in heaven.⁸ **rather, be afraid of the one** Since Satan deceives and tempts souls into sin, he should be feared and resisted as our worst enemy. However, God should also be feared since He alone administers perfect justice and can send the faithless to eternal punishment. A holy fear of God is thus necessary to avoid sin and its consequences.⁸ **who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.** This was a place where Jews idolatrously slaughtered their own sons and daughters to the god Moloch in imitation of the human sacrifices of the surrounding peoples. This area south of Jerusalem eventually became the public dump and incinerator so that smoke and the smell of putrefaction were always present in the area.¹¹ Over time it became associated with the punishment for the

wicked after death. Using this and other gospel texts, the Church teaches that hell exists and that those who die in mortal sin suffer eternal punishment.¹⁰ Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, “eternal fire.” Of course, the chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God.⁷ (CCC 1035)

29are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? The sparrow, a small bird eaten by the poor, was the cheapest meat that one could buy at the market.¹⁶ **Yet not one of them falls to the ground** This refers to the death of the bird.³ **without your Father’s knowledge.** St. Jerome says: If little birds, which are of so little value, still come under the providence and care of God, how is it that you, who are immortal, can fear that you are not looked after carefully by him whom you respect as your Father?¹⁰

30Even all the hairs of your head are counted. Who can value and love his own creation more than God? Jesus does not say that the Father *knows how many hairs* I have, but that the hairs on my head *have been counted*.¹¹ Every hair has its own separate follicle.¹⁶ Jesus is telling them of God’s care for every detail of their lives.

31So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

32Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. This acknowledgement would be the typical confession of the primitive Church that Jesus is Messiah and Lord. The reward of confession or denial is that Jesus will accept or disown according to one’s fidelity.³ This is described in Revelation 3:5: “He who is victorious shall be robed all in white; his name I will never strike off the rolls of the living, for in the presence of my father and his angels I will acknowledge him as mine.” The final judgment before God will be based on the disciples’ faithfulness to Jesus during the conflicts that are part of their mission.⁹ According to “The New Persecuted” by Antonio Socci, in 2000 years of Christian history, about 70 million faithful have given their lives for the faith and of these, 45.5 million — fully 65%—were in the 20th century.

33But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father. The Catechism tells us that ALL must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks. Service and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation.⁷ (CCC 1816)

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2002” by Aelred R. Rosser; (2) “Jeremiah 1-25” by Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P., (3) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (4) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible; The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans” With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (5) “The Navarre Bible: Romans And Galatians,” (6) “Responding To God” Prepared by the Dominicans of the Central Province of St. Albert the Great, (7) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (8) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew” With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (9) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Matthew” by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (10) “The Navarre Bible: St. Matthew,” (11) “Fire Of Mercy, Heart Of The Word,” by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, (12) “The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets,” (13) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (14) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by James L. Weaver, (15) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, and (16) “The Gospel of Matthew” by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J.

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