

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

Jeremiah is the second of the four great prophets of Israel; a contemporary of Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk. He was born in the last part of the reign of Manasseh, about 645 years before the birth of Jesus and almost a century after Isaiah.

Called by God to be a prophet at the age of 19, he remained unmarried and celibate by order of Yahweh (Jeremiah 16:2). For more than 40 years, up to his death, he remained faithful to his vocation and prophesied until after the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C.

In the 52 chapters of this book, oracles alternate with passages of history which confirm and illustrate the prophecies. The book as we have it does not follow a chronological or other order because it is, as Saint Jerome described, more a collection of writings than a book in the proper sense. These writings consist of a series of warnings and threats of divine retribution for the unfaithfulness of the chosen people and also for the behavior of the neighboring peoples.

Our reading for today comes from the prologue which gives an account of his calling. It is a dialog between Yahweh and Jeremiah.

4 The word of the LORD came to me thus: 5 Before I formed you

The verb *yâsar* refers primarily to the modeling of pottery. Genesis 2:7-8 depicts God as a potter and the verb took on the technical meaning “to create” (See also Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 18:6; Romans 9:20).

in the womb

After Jeremiah, it became an accepted idea that God Himself forms the 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 (see Job 10:8-12; Psalm 139:13).

I knew you,

The verb *yâdâ* does not refer exclusively to an intellectual knowledge; it involves as well an action of the will and sensibility.

before you were born I dedicated you,

The verb *qâdas* can also be translated “to sanctify” or “to consecrate.” The basic meaning refers to

separation for divine service. Jeremiah was set aside by God for his prophetic mission.

a prophet to the nations I appointed you.

More than just Judah. Former prophets were also concerned with the neighboring countries for two main reasons:

- 1) The history of the chosen people was always closely mingled with the history of the entire Near East; and
- 2) The prophets had a keen sense of the ruling power of Yahweh over the universe – He was the God of all history.

¹⁷ But do you gird your loins;

The girding of loins points to the promptness in the accomplishment of an order (1 Kings 18:46), immediate preparation for combat (Job 38:3; 40:7), or immediate action (Exodus 12:11).

stand up and tell them all that I command you. Be not crushed on their account, as though I would leave you crushed before them; ¹⁸ For it is I this day who have made you a fortified city, A pillar of iron, a wall of brass, against the whole land:

The same imagery is used in Ezekiel's call (Ezekiel 3:8-9). Those who will have to encounter such a firm man of God are the leaders of Judah, both political and religious, and their subjects. The prophets must have steadfast strength.

Against Judah's kings and princes, against its priests and people. ¹⁹ They will fight against you, but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.

2nd Reading - 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

Our second reading this week continues from where we left off last week when we heard the Christian community (the Church) compared to the human body, and that no one part is more important than another as all parts serve to make the common good. Now we go on to discuss the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

^{12:31} Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way. ^{13:1} If I speak in human and angelic tongues

All possible tongues. The allusion is to the gift of tongues. The rabbis had speculated on the language of angels.

“Paul chooses speaking in tongues as his example because the Corinthians thought that it was the greatest of the gifts. This was because it had been given to the apostles on the day of Pentecost, before any of the others. The tongues of angels are those which are perceived by the mind, not by the ear.” [Saint Theodoret of Cyr (ca. A.D. 445), *Interpretation of the Fourteen Epistles of Paul* 251]

but do not have love,

Supernatural love; what theologians term the virtue of charity. *Agape* as opposed to *philia* (brotherly love/friendship) or *eros* (sexual passion).

I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. ² And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries 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. ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, ⁵ it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury,

Is not resentful or does not plot evil.

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

Truth is justice, moral rightness.

“Cast off the sullenness of an angry man which you are evincing by your silence, and regain joy in your heart, peace toward your like-minded brothers and sisters, and zeal and solicitude for the preservation of the churches of the Lord.” [Saint Basil the Great (between A.D. 357-378), *Letter* (no.65) to *Atarbius*

“Love hates what is unjust and rejoices in what is good and honorable.” [Saint Theodoret of Cyr (ca. A.D. 445), *Interpretation of the Fourteen Epistles of Paul* 253]

⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love 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. ⁹ For we know partially and we prophesy partially, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When 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.

Charity is eternal but the gifts are transitory. There will be no need or use for them in heaven, just as a man has no use for the toys of his childhood.

¹² At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face.

The hope of all is to see God face to face. Although God is with us on earth, we can't see his face. Even Moses couldn't see God face to face in this world (Exodus 32:20). In a mirror we have an indirect vision of an object; we don't see the object itself, but its reflection.

At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.

In heaven I will be granted everything, just as God knows everything now.

13 So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Of the three theological virtues, love (charity) is the most important.

“Charity is the bond of brotherhood, the foundation of peace, the steadfastness and firmness of unity. It is greater than both hope and faith. It excels both good works and suffering of the faith. As an eternal virtue, it will abide with us forever in the kingdom of heaven.” [Saint Cyprian of Carthage (A.D. 256), *The Advantage of Patience* 15]

Gospel - Luke 4:21-30

Of all the books in the Bible, 73 in all, only 2 were not written by Jews: Luke and Acts. Both of these were written by Luke, a Syrian convert and disciple of Paul.

Last week’s Gospel reading was from the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry when He went to His home town, Nazareth, and in the synagogue read from the scroll of Isaiah. Today’s reading continues this event in His life.

21 Jesus began speaking in the synagogue, saying:] “Today

Luke’s theme is fulfillment of promise. The waiting is over; the Messiah has arrived.

this scripture passage

Isaiah 61:1-2

is fulfilled in your hearing.” 22 And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

They showed admiration and astonishment at His charm and eloquence.

They also asked, “Isn’t this the son of Joseph?”

Luke has recorded the virginal conception of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38), but Mary is the wife of Joseph and the normal reaction attributes Jesus to Joseph. The hearers, probably relatives, know Jesus as the son of Joseph and have watched Him grow up and think of Him only as human.

23 He 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 phrase is future tense. Jesus doesn’t go to Capernaum in this Gospel until the verse immediately after today’s reading. However, in the Gospel of John, Jesus visits Capernaum immediately after the wedding feast at Cana, before clearing the temple and meeting with Nicodemus. Assuming for a moment that this was the actual chronology, then it would show that although the people of

Nazareth at first listened to Jesus readily, they were superficial and in their pride, they felt hurt that Jesus, their fellow townsman (if not relative), had not worked in Nazareth the wonders He worked elsewhere. They presume they have a special entitlement and they demand that He perform miracles to satisfy their vanity, not to change their hearts.

²⁴ And he said, "Amen,

This phrase always introduces a solemn declaration uttered only by Jesus in the Gospels (in the Revised Standard Version: Matthew 30 times, Mark 13 times, Luke 7 times, John 25 times; in the New American Bible: Matthew 31 times, Mark 14 times, Luke 6 times, John 24 times).

I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. ²⁵ Indeed, 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 and a severe famine spread over the entire land. ²⁶ It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon.

Elijah and the drought (1 Kings 17-18)

²⁷ Again, 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."

Elisha and the curing of Naaman (2 Kings 5). Like Elijah and Elisha, Jesus will eventually direct His apostles beyond Judaism to the entire Gentile world. Jesus performs no miracles for the Nazorians, but instead reproaches them. One needs to be well disposed of miracles are to lead to faith and these people are not.

²⁸ When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. ²⁹ They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong.

The language used in this episode is very similar to that used to describe the rejection of Stephen (Acts 7:58) and of Paul (Acts 13:50). Jesus' attitude has so wounded the pride of his fellow townspeople that they are ready to kill him.

³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went away.

Jesus doesn't flee but walks away majestically, leaving the crowd paralyzed. As on other occasions men do Him no harm; it was by God's decree that He died on the cross (see John 18:32; John 3:14; Matthew 20:19) when His hour had come.