

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 7:23-28

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah:

Thus says the LORD: This is what I commanded my people: Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk in all the ways that I command you, so that you may prosper. But they obeyed not, nor did they pay heed. They walked in the hardness of their evil hearts and turned their backs, not their faces, to me. From the day that your fathers left the land of Egypt even to this day, I have sent you untiringly all my servants the prophets. Yet they have not obeyed me nor paid heed; they have stiffened their necks and done worse than their fathers. When you speak all these words to them, they will not listen to you either; when you call to them, they will not answer you. Say to them: This is the nation that does not listen to the voice of the LORD, its God, or take correction. Faithfulness has disappeared; the word itself is banished from their speech.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD; let us acclaim the Rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing PSALM s to him.

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the LORD who made us. For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice: "Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the desert, Where your fathers tempted me; they tested me though they had seen my works."

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

GOSPEL: Luke 11:14-23

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute, and when the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke and the crowds were amazed. Some of them said, "By the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he drives out demons." Others, to test him, asked him for a sign from heaven. But he knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house. And if Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that it is by Beelzebul that I drive out demons. If I, then, drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own people drive them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man fully armed guards his palace, his possessions are

safe. But when one stronger than he attacks and overcomes him, he takes away the armor on which he relied and distributes the spoils. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 2nd Thursday of Lent

Jeremiah gives us a frightening message this morning. “Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings!” We are a social species. None of us can thrive and survive alone. A year of social distancing and working from home tells us differently. It has been dangerous not to trust others. For the better part of a year, doctors and epidemiologists have been telling us to wear a mask when we interact with others outside our homes, keep at least six feet apart and to wash our hands often. Many people have not trusted them at their peril.

When we enter a store, we have to trust that the other patrons, store operators and employees keep other people’s health and wellbeing first and foremost in their priorities. We trust that when we mail a letter, that some one will deliver it to its destination. When we order something on Amazon we trust that our item will arrive in a timely manner. We depend upon so many other people. Our families have been essential to our ability to cope with life during this pandemic. Keeping in touch over the phone, through email and via texting has been critical for us to have arrived to this day.

We trust our technologies too. The internet and cable TV have been god sends. When we get into our cars and drive on the express way, we trust the work of our mechanic, the integrity and sobriety of our fellow commuters. We also must trust our own integrity and sobriety. Why would God’s prophet Jeremiah curse us for doing what is necessary for us to live our lives in this world?

We are all believers in God and in God’s son, Jesus. I trust this for I wouldn’t have written this reflection and you wouldn’t be reading my thoughts without faith in Jesus Christ or at least interest in Jesus. When I go to sleep at night and when I wake up in the morning, I do so by the grace of God. Being a believer affects all I see and hear, all I say and do and the way I interact with life, events and other people. It is possible for all of us, with just a thought, to recognize the presence of God in all things, events and people. We know that God has made everything that is including you and me. We know this because God has gifted us with faith. Our interaction in this world is always from this perspective.

We live because God gifted us with life. We believe because God has gifted us with Faith. We live in society because God has gifted us with one another. We trust God; God has entrusted us. We know that when two or three gather in Jesus’ name, Jesus is in our midst. I trust Jesus’ promise. I also trust that as I seek Jesus’ presence, God’s grace is at work in the lives of others whether they know it or not. God works in God’s time. Trusting others can be an act of trusting God.

Abraham's closing remarks have proven to be prophetic. Not everyone believes in Jesus who rose from the dead. God has not yet given them faith in Jesus. All Christians believe, but not everyone is Christian. Living and accepting life as it is a challenge. Yet we trust that God will work in God's own time as we strive for the Kingdom of God and await Jesus' return.

Years ago I heard a reflection on this parable of Jesus. Throughout the story we do not hear Lazarus' voice. He did not speak. He accepted his life's fate and death in silence. What would he say about the Rich Man in hell for eternity? It seems that the barrier between Eternal Rest and Eternal Torture is both impenetrable and transparent. Not only can the Rich Man see Lazarus resting in the bosom of Abraham in eternity but Lazarus can witness the agony of the Rich Man. How would Lazarus be at rest witnessing another's eternal suffering. What would his response to Father Abraham be? If Lazarus had no compassion and mercy for a fellow sufferer and did not raise his voice in protest, would he be any different from the Rich Man? If he remained silent, would his eternity be his bliss or his torment? Remember, in the story Abraham and the Rich Man carry on a conversation. Could Lazarus rest amid the Rich Man's screams?

The reflection I heard gave Lazarus a voice. With that voice he said, "Father Abraham, I cannot treat a fellow human being in the manner he treated me. Did not the Lord God create him too? Didn't his family love him? Aren't I a sinner like him? How can I rest in peace knowing while a fellow human being and sinner scream for all eternity? I forgive him. Can you?" This may be the lesson of this story; one that tests how we share the forgiveness God has given us and the salvation that Jesus has won for us. The love of God is infinite, eternal and unconditional. As believers we hold God's gift in earthen vessels. We also have the capacity to share God's gift. When our capacity reaches our limits, we can rely on God having none. What would we say to Abraham?

May God give you health, strength and patience. May our lives give witness to the love of God.

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