

## **Readings and Reflection for Tuesday the 17<sup>th</sup> Week of the Year**

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 14:17-22

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah:

Let my eyes stream with tears day and night, without rest, Over the great destruction which overwhelms the virgin daughter of my people, over her incurable wound. If I walk out into the field, look! those slain by the sword; If I enter the city, look! those consumed by hunger. Even the prophet and the priest forage in a land they know not. Have you cast Judah off completely? Is Zion loathsome to you? Why have you struck us a blow that cannot be healed? We wait for peace, to no avail; for a time of healing, but terror comes instead. We recognize, O LORD, our wickedness, the guilt of our fathers; that we have sinned against you. For your name's sake spurn us not, disgrace not the throne of your glory; remember your covenant with us, and break it not. Among the nations' idols is there any that gives rain? Or can the mere heavens send showers? Is it not you alone, O LORD, our God, to whom we look? You alone have done all these things.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 79:8, 9, 11 and 13

***For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.***

Remember not against us the iniquities of the past; may your compassion quickly come to us, for we are brought very low.

***For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.***

Help us, O God our savior, because of the glory of your name; Deliver us and pardon our sins for your name's sake.

***For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.***

Let the prisoners' sighing come before you; with your great power free those doomed to death. Then we, your people and the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; through all generations we will declare your praise.

***For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.***

Gospel: Matthew 13:36-43

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus dismissed the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He said in reply, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the Kingdom. The weeds are the children of the Evil One, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the

end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his Kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for Tuesday the 17<sup>th</sup> Week of the Year**

I read the first reading from Jeremiah and was blown away. It parallels the situation of our world today. We face a dual wound of prejudice and pandemic. These crises will not go away by themselves. We would like, like Jeremiah, for God to intervene with a mighty miracle. That’s unlikely. Plagues have ravaged the human race in waves since our beginnings. Our cleverness can lead to treatments and vaccines for many of these. Many of the most virulent diseases are no longer the threat they were. However there is no treatment and no vaccine for COVID 19. The pandemic rages and we speak of recovery. We act as if the disease is little threat. The number of infections continued to drop until mid-June. Since we have entered the “new phase” in recovery the numbers of new infections has continued to rise. We have, in the state of Illinois, had infection levels on a par of what we had in April. Life is no longer normal. Hospitalizations and deaths continue to decline, but with new infections each day above one thousand, in two to four weeks those will rise too. The decrees of leaders of business, industry, government and church have neither authority nor power over a virus. It only takes one person exposed and infected to spread this insidious disease to friends, family, business, government and church. The hand of God will not protect God’s faithful from it either.

We still judge one another too. Jesus told us that as we judge others, God will judge us. It matters not if we judge someone else by the color of their skin, the content of their character, the smell of their food, their level of fluency in English or if they believe as we do and go to church. Judgment itself is the sin. It may be one of the greatest of sins too. Jesus told us that judgment belongs to the Father, God alone. When we judge others, we assume the role of God. That is the definition of idolatry. We make ourselves God. When Jesus tells us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, does he tell us to become God? No, he says something with much more nuance and beauty. The first letter of John tells us the God is love. How is God perfect? God is perfect love. God’s love is eternal and unconditional. God has compassion and mercy for sinners always and forever, without limits. In this we need perfection. God has not changed human nature. Through faith, God transforms us. We show this transformation in how we act, think and feel. We live this transformation in our interactions with others. To condemn is human and to forgive is divine. With God’s grace we can choose to forgive and to see God’s present in all people, whether we like and trust them or not.

God works best in the world through us. Without our cooperation, without our hands and work, God remains an abstraction. The Word became flesh. The Word remains words on a page without us, who believe living them in our flesh. We can choose to see the presence of God in

others; we can choose to be kind. Living the gospel is a choice. God's grace to do so, God gives freely. Without God's grace we will fail. God changes us before God changes our environment. We act as God's agents.

Jeremiah's powerful lament carries much the same meaning. He truly wanted God's people, then in his time, to become transformed in, through and with God's Word, Covenant and Law thereby changing themselves, their community, their nation and the rest of the world. Jeremiah's lament also reflected the powerful truth that even in the catastrophes, death and Diaspora to come, God would remain faithful and present to God's people. God wasn't just carried into exile with God's people. God's people brought God into a pagan, faithless world. We, as believers, are witness, today, to this truth.

To live our faith and to act as God's witnesses are the fruits of God's grace. We do so when we wear our masks in public, wash our hands and surfaces and keep six feet apart as we interact with others. We bring God into a waiting world. When we stop to recognize God in all we meet, we give witness to our growing perfection in God's life and love. When we show compassion and mercy as we forgive others, we live the redemption Jesus has won for us by his death on the cross. Jesus has commanded us to take up our cross and follow in his steps. The Via Crucis (way of the cross) was not easy for Jesus. It is not easy for us either. We do have the same advantage that Jesus had. He knew what we know, God is love and God loves us with and eternal and unconditional love. God gives us the grace, what we need, to accomplish God's will. The path to the kingdom was never intended to be easy, just simple.

We just had this same gospel, in context though, a week ago on the 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year. It provides a powerful image of the last judgment. Deep within our hearts, perhaps, we want to see the world's evil sinners hurled into hell in everlasting punishment for being so nasty in life, perhaps to us. I've said this before. Thank God I am not God. This is true especially when I drive. How many of my fellow crazy drivers have I wished that fate? I seriously doubt that if I were God, there would be anyone left on earth, including me. How many times have I despaired over my weaknesses, mistakes and sin? True change without God's grace is impossible. God's love, mercy and compassion are limitless. We must, as Catholic, believe in hell. We also believe and trust in God's power to forgive. We do not, however, have to believe that there's anybody in hell. There is an ancient prayer in the Orthodox and Catholic Eastern Rite liturgical tradition. It is in the Divine Liturgy of St. James. The prayer prays that, upon Jesus' return to establish the kingdom of God, God may forgive Satan and restore him to the ranks of angels. This liturgy is long and only celebrated a few times during the year. This concept may seem bizarre and foreign, but mercy is at the heart of God and redemption the purpose of God becoming like us, in Jesus. My mercy, not God's, has limits.

Having said this, I made one salient point on the Gospel. Why allow evil to continue? Sometimes evil may be the path, through God's mercy, to salvation. How many of us have learned from our mistakes? How many of us have experienced God's forgiveness? We may have done something really bad, but before and by God only once! This was my point. The harvest was full of weeds and wheat. The wheat made bread and the weeds fueled the oven to

bake it. "O happy fault; O necessary sin of Adam," is part of the great Easter hymn, the Exultet. Without human sin, Jesus would not have been born; humanity would have no need for salvation and therefore no need for God. We believe God intended the Word to become flesh, to die, rise and return as part of God's original plan. Redemption, salvation and the Kingdom show that God is love, eternal and unconditional.

Condemnation, punishment and eternal torment are threats. God saved us from those things through Jesus' death and resurrection. God offers us the way to salvation through faith in Jesus. A threat is bad news. Avoiding hell as the way to heaven is not the way of the cross. It is the way of human nature. Through Jesus, God gives us good news. Jesus reveals to us God's essential nature, love. When Jesus says that the righteous will shine, only he is righteous. We are basically sinners made righteous through faith in him. Our complete transformation will take a lifetime of witness, sin and forgiveness. One only becomes a saint, or holy, when one ceases to sin. One stops being a sinner when one dies. Only the dead can be saints. One becomes holy when one returns to God for only God is holy. God's plan for our transformation and the coming of the kingdom occurs in God's time, not ours.

To glimpse God's kingdom is a gift. On the news, testing proceeds on treatments and vaccines for COVID 19. Many of the commercials on television have encouragements to keep our hands clean, wear masks in public and wash our hands. We, at Divine Savior, continue a weekly caravan to St. Eulalia's food pantry. Check out their "Thank You," video on our website. Last Sunday, a family gave me some tomatoes from their garden. People continue to check on neighbors. These may not be great deeds, but through them we can glimpse the Glory of God and what awaits us in the Kingdom of God.

The lament and prayer of Jeremiah could be ours. God brings the necessary and refreshing rain. God is with us in times triumph and trouble. God leads and supports us on the way of the cross. When we hurt, when we stumble and when we sin, God forgives. With all our faults and failings God loves us forever for who we are not what we do. We will become the bread of the kingdom with our sins as the fuel to bake it.

Be safe as you keep others safe; we are all in this together bound with God's love.

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