

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 2026

"But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph." (Jeremiah 20:11)

In today's first reading, a Lesson from the Prophet Jeremiah, we find the prophet appealing for help to God in the face of persecution. Now, it would not be true to say that all of the Old Testament prophets were persecuted. As the history of ancient Israel progressed, however, it became more and more common for the prophets of God, people entrusted by God with a message for God's people, to be persecuted by a nation that was largely uninterested in listening to what God had to tell them. Now, before going any further, I want to caution people against taking anything that follows as applying positively or negatively to the modern state of Israel. Modern Israel isn't really any more a continuation of ancient Israel than modern Italy is a continuation of ancient Rome. Vast amounts of water have flowed under lots of bridges, and too much has changed. With that notice out of the way, I can say that the sequence of Old Testament books from Genesis to Second Chronicles and Second Kings can be called "The Rise and Fall of Israel." After the fall of Israel, there is a set of books that can be called "The Beginning of Judaism." There was, under God's providence, a new beginning after the complete failure of the Kingdom of Israel, something less like a kingdom and more like what we would call a religion, the religion of Judaism, the religion in which Jesus of Nazareth was raised. That is looking down the historical road. For this homily's purpose, looking at the prophets of the Old Testament, we see the failure of ancient Israel.

It is striking that the longer ancient Israel existed, the worse it treated its prophets. The early prophets had some bad moments with the people of Israel, but in the end they were respected and honored. Moses ended his days as Israel's supreme lawgiver and judge. Samuel was mourned by all Israel and was buried with great honor and solemnity. David ended his days on the throne, ruler over all Israel.

With the later prophets, it was different, Elijah and Obidiah lived as homeless exiles. Micah experienced imprisonment. Isaiah may have been murdered, and Zechariah certainly was.

It is the persecutions and disappointments suffered by the Prophet Jeremiah, however, that are most vividly described in the Old Testament. He was tortured and imprisoned by his own king, set free by the enemy king who destroyed Jerusalem, and then kidnapped and held hostage by what can reasonably be called a band of hardline Israelite terrorists. He lived to see the final fall of the Kingdom of Israel, and to see the remnant of Israel reacting badly to the disaster. Jeremiah was doomed to be rejected by his people when he called them to be faithful to God, and doomed to die in exile - in Egypt no less! It was as though the Exodus had been reversed, and as though the whole story of ancient Israel had been a total failure.

In fact, God was up to something utterly unexpected, as He usually is. Through Ezekiel, the Prophet to the exiles in Babylon, God began forming out of the wreckage of the Kingdom of Israel the Jewish Religion, a religion that continues to this day, in which the Son of Man was formed, according to the flesh. Jeremiah was not destined to see that, however. All he could see was failure, though, by God's Grace, he still had hope in the unseen Providence of God.

Quite simply, that sometimes is what we have to do. Sometimes our efforts in this world have evident success. Often, they do not. Occasionally, they even have evident failure. It

might happen that all we can see is failure. In those moments, may God give us the Grace to trust in His unseen, loving, mysteriously powerful Providence.

When young Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry, the tide seemed to have turned for ancient Israel. An energetic, twenty year old king, Josiah, was actively reforming the nation, recalling it to the way of faithfulness to God and to justice. Only 20 years old, he was already experiencing success in restoring Israel to its former goodness and glory. He might reign another 50 years! What might such a king accomplish in 50 years!

But no. As the Prophetess Huldah had warned before Josiah was born, Israel was too far decayed for one good king to bring it back to true health. Josiah would die bravely in battle against Egypt, a mercy that spared him the disappointment of struggling into middle age to rule a corrupted people who were no longer worthy of a good king. God was preparing the end of the Kingdom of Israel and the beginning of the Religion of Judaism, a central event in the divine plan for human salvation, centered on our Lord Jesus Christ. Ezekiel was destined to be part of the new beginning. Jeremiah was destined to be part of the end of the old order, a small kingdom centered on Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's work bore good fruit, in that his prophecies in the years after his death helped form the new Jewish Religion and, in the long run, foretold and prepared the way for the coming of the human race's Savior, the God-Man Jesus Christ. Jeremiah labored, but did not see the good results of his labor. Good results came, but he did not see them. He saw only disappointment, disappointment that he sometimes expressed to God very candidly. He never ceased to be faithful, however. He never stopped doing the Lord's work.

With God's help, we need to be like that. If we see good results from our work, let's be grateful. If we don't, let's be blessedly stubborn. There is a certain holy stubbornness that keeps doing what God wants us to do, even in the face of defeat and disappointment.

I do not know if, in my lifetime, there will be a real Catholic revival or not. In some places there are some hopeful signs just now, but for most of my 60 years the Church has been mostly losing its bout with the world, the flesh, and the devil. One sees family and former parishioners drifting away. Am I on the winning side? The empty tomb of Easter Sunday and the thunderous end of the Book of Revelation say that I am. In the end, Jesus wins. By the power of supernatural Faith and Hope, all of us can persevere in fighting the good fight of Faith, even when we seem to be taking a beating.

Not what you came to hear? Really, this is a kind of pep talk. Not only CAN we still win this thing, we WILL still win this thing, for the Lord Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death. It is the coward who quits when the fight is hard, and the Kingdom of Heaven is not for cowards. Fight, then; but fight so as to win.

Don't speak thoughtlessly. Be careful of where your eyes go. With God's help, subdue pride, envy, wrath, gluttony, sloth, greed, and lust. Endure the mockery of the irreligious, listen to God's word, and pray daily. Then, victory will certainly be yours, in God's good time.

If, God helping, we can do those things, then, as another Prophet said, our light shall shine in darkness, and darkness for us shall be like the noon of day. Then we shall be like a watered garden, like a flowing spring whose waters fail not. (Isaiah 58: 10-11)