

Jeremiah 20:10-13; Ps 68; Romans 12-15; Matt 10:26-33

In the first reading, Jeremiah is bemoaning that he hears ‘*many whispering. Terror is on every side!*’ Jeremiah! You are not dreaming this, they are out to get you. You are a prophet, and the message God has asked you deliver is not well received by those for whom it is intended. The message is this:

Behold I am bringing such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. Because the people have forsaken me and profaned this place...¹

Symbolically Jeremiah takes a piece of pottery and breaks it to show what is to happen to an unrepentant Israel. What are the sins of Israel? Mainly worshipping false Gods, and child sacrifice.² It is a very modern story for being 2,500 years old.

The reaction is not one of repentance. Rather, the High Priest Pashur, beats Jeremiah, and puts him in prison. Jeremiah is not sensible enough to shut up, so he continues to prophecy that the kingdom of Babylon is going to destroy Jerusalem. The people in power respond: *“This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city as you have heard with your own ears.”³* In addition to this his books (okay scrolls) are burnt and he is stuck in a deep, muddy pit.

The last lines of the reading seem remote from all that befalls Jeremiah: ‘*Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD? For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evil does.*’ Well Jeremiah will not be killed, but does end up going into exile to Egypt. And, although Jeremiah believes that the Israelites will be forgiven by God, and will return to Jerusalem, and that Babylon will itself be destroyed, there is no recorded happy ending for this prophet. He did what God asked of Him. That was both his suffering and his joy.

And now the Gospel. Well, almost. An aside first. In between writing this I uploaded an image to Instagram and I glanced at a feed that running below it. It was of a young woman in her early twenties wearing shirts with provocative saying in a number of locations. On a college campus she wore one that said “Jesus is the light of the world”, in a shopping mall the back of her shirt was emblazoned with the Holy Name of God, and at a Pride March her shirt said, ‘Jesus loves you.’ The responses were not all positive. You might say that she was being provocative. Maybe. But perhaps God *is* provocative. Maybe she is a prophet.

Anyway, the Gospel. Oh, sorry, one more pause:

John the Baptist lost his head for professing Jesus. So did Peter and Paul.

St Clare disobeyed her parents and ran off to the religious life.

St Francis obeyed God and embraced a leper, and lots of people thought he was mad.

St Theresa of the Cross upset her mother by becoming a Christian, and then died in the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz.

¹ Jeremiah 19:3-4

² Jeremiah 19: 5

³ Ibid 26:11

St Faustina was asked by Jesus ‘how long must I wait?, after obeying her mother and not becoming a nun.’

Padre Pio hid his wounds of Christ but spoke of His mercy.

Clare Crocket was subject to years of derision and mockery from those she loved most when she pursued her vocation.

The followers of Jesus do not seem to hide very well, or slip into the cracks.

Okay, third time lucky, the Gospel:

Jesus says to his Apostles, ‘*What I tell you in the dark, say in the light*’. This seems to mean that what he says to you in private, is to be proclaimed in public. Why is this word of Jesus said in dark in the first place? Because it is a personal gift, an entrusted treasure, but the only way to respond to give thanks for this treasure is to declare it. This is not always so easy.

It is particularly not easy to share it, or defend it, with those whom you love. Family are the harshest critics. Family can be the most hostile of territory for Jesus. That is painful. However, you can opt for the quiet life, or for the eternal life. I do not mean that eternal life depends on you ramming your faith down other people’s throats. I do not mean this at all. But Jesus said we have infinite value, much more than many sparrows, and we also have a task: ‘*Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.*’⁴

Jesus gave up everything: His divinity, His Father, his kingship, his authority, his friendships, his dignity, his safety, his comfort, his robe, his mother and then his life when he scaled the cross for love of you. He

does not even say you ‘owe Him’ for this. But if you understand something of the magnitude of His love for you, you might speak of it on occasion.

So be courageous in making Mass is a priority, even over good company. Be resolute before the temptation to do something,⁵ or say something which compromises your fear of breaking God’s commandments. Whisper the words: ‘I do not consent’. Turn away from every day temptations with a quiet prayer, but be ready to take your stand in the face of what is evil.

Jeremiah, the saints, the woman with the shirt emblazoned with God’s love: it may not be easy, - what of value is ever easy - but it does bring with it its own, deeper, peace. Maybe the asides are essential: the ability to face Love with Love.

⁴ Matthew 10:32

⁵ I cannot find the feed again. But it was there, although I have had to recall imperfectly some of the captions on the shirts. Was it done just for the Instagram feed, or with sincerity?

Perhaps both. Maybe it needs to be done on occasion, especially in a culture when obscenities are so common on T-shirts.