

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
January 30, 2022**

SCRIPTURES:

Jeremiah 1:4-5,17-19	A prophet facing rejection still must speak the truth.
1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13	The greatest of the gifts is love.
Luke 4:21-30	Does God abandon those who rejected prophets and now Jesus?
Psalm 71:1-6, 15-17	Those who trust in God will not be disappointed.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Luke:

Jesus has just begun his public ministry in his hometown in Galilee. In the Gospel we heard last Sunday, Jesus defines to whom he has been sent: the poor. Now, who are the poor? Just the people of Israel? Just the people of Nazareth? No! Jesus seeks out a much broader group of people for his ministry: outcasts, sinners, the lost, n'er-do-wells, Gentiles even! But this is not acceptable to the people of Nazareth. So, they try to hurl him over the edge of the cliff.

We always need to look at the situation in the community at the time the Gospel was written. What was going on for this group that included both Jewish and Gentile converts? Was there any hope for these descendants of the Jews who rejected Jesus? Did God not allow their Temple in Jerusalem to be destroyed (70 AD) and the people of Israel to be scattered throughout the Roman world? Does God still love them? Luke's response is that Jesus himself was rejected, but God came to him and exalted him in glory for his faithfulness. The message seems to be that the Jewish people can be saved, even though they rejected Jesus, if they will repent and turn to the Gospel.

The Gentile-Christian community for whom Luke writes is relatively well-to-do. Does Jesus still love them when he seemed so obviously to prefer the "poor" in his day? Luke wants them to know that they will be loved by Jesus if they truly welcome the poor in their midst. There can never be any discrimination toward those whom God has invited to the community of faith. Who are we to set aside those who have been called by God?

Look at the "poor" among us today: Those who have been divorced and remarried "outside the Church," those who had abandoned the practice of the faith for a time and who have recently come back to the fellowship of the Church, those addicted to alcohol or drugs who have not yet been able yet to shake the addictions, those who have been caught in sexual misdeeds, and often, too, the victims of abuse who feel so "poor" among us.

The poor are not always welcome in our assemblies. They are so different. They embarrass us often. They just don't fit in, do they? If only we could define the poor the way we want and not have to pay attention to Jesus' definition! We have never been so poor ourselves as when we were rejected by those in charge in the community of faith.

Laypersons, too, need to be especially careful that, in exercising leadership roles in the Church, they not become rigid and tyrannical toward those they are meant to serve.

Jeremiah

The religious and political reforms initiated by King Josiah (640 to 609 BCE) quickly came to an end after the death of the king. His successors were weaklings who tried to appease the mighty powers of Egypt and Babylon by compromising the faith of their ancestors, all without success. By 587 BCE, with Jeremiah still living to witness the truth of his prophecies, the whole nation collapses and is taken into exile. The Temple is destroyed. Israel as an institution is gone. Jeremiah's ministry is not self-appointed; it is God who calls even this youth (20 or so years old, without authority). "I formed you...I knew you...I dedicated you. What do you have to fear?" God is close to the one he calls and sends. God stands with him in power and with divine authority. However, persecution because of the message is inevitable.

1 Corinthians:

Having just discussed the diversity of the spiritual gifts (last week's Lectionary), Paul moves on to the ranking of these same gifts. He sums up all the gifts in three: faith, hope, and love. Then, he categorically assigns the highest rank to love. There follows that description of what love does in practice: The Ode to Love. The Church needs to remember the context within which Paul writes this Ode to Love. It is within the community celebrating the eucharistic meal that faith, hope, and love find their proper meaning. Paul is writing to the Church at Corinth to correct some abuses within the community, particularly with respect to those having to do with the Eucharist. Eating the Lord's Supper is no place for drunkenness or for putting down one's neighbor. Are we not all one body? Have we not been given many spiritual gifts? Is love not the greatest of those gifts?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where does your family or your parish fit in among those who have power and authority, prestige and fame? Are you given the message that your group is not as good as it should be? Do those who have power in society or in the Church treat you as if you had no power or authority? What messages do you get about power and authority in this world?
2. Identify those who are rejected from the fellowship of the Church itself today. What can your parish do to call those people to fellowship and integration? What can you do personally to empower those who have been deprived of power? Explain how the work of empowering the weak is really a work of enriching the poor.
3. What hope is there for us in the message of today's Scripture? Do we find consolation in the fact that we can be saved from our sinfulness? Do you consider yourself "poor?" How does the Church practice poverty in order to be favored by Christ? Do you understand why those in religious orders make vows of poverty in the Church?

PRAYER

God blesses those people
who depend only on him.
They belong to the kingdom of heaven.
God blesses those people
who grieve.
They will find comfort.
God blesses those people
who are humble.
The earth will belong to them.
God blesses those people
who want to obey him
more than to eat or drink.
They will be given
what they want.

God blesses those people
who are merciful.
They will be treated
with mercy.
God blesses those people
whose hearts are pure.
They will see him.
God blesses those people
who make peace.
They will be called his children.
God blesses those people
who are treated badly.
They belong
to the kingdom of heaven.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Church has put to the forefront and added a new emphasis to its self-definition as a “communion” of the faithful with Jesus Christ and with one another. From the very beginning in the Acts of Apostles, we see the Church as a community of prayer, of fellowship, and of service. In the Apostles’ Creed, we have proclaimed that we believe in the “communion of saints.” The community of all the members of the Church constitutes in itself a sacred mystery which carries and proclaims the love of God for all humankind. The Church is itself a sacred mystery which carries and proclaims the love of God for all humankind. The Church is itself a sacrament which embodies and reveals Christ to the world.

In addition to its dimension as hierarchy or structure (leadership and authority), the Church is fundamentally a community of those who believe in Christ, those who have been called by God to be his people in Christ, those who have responded to that call and have dedicated themselves to the values of the Gospel. The Church is a communion of members who share a love for the Lord Jesus. Christ himself is the head of that communion. To be in the Church is to be in communion with Christ.

To be in the Church is to be in communion also with all those who participate in that communion. The Holy Spirit creates and animates that communion. The very life of God, poured out in the resurrection of Christ, is given to all believers so that they may form a living organism with one another for the glory of God. The inner life of the community of faith is a supernatural life of grace, given by God, through Jesus Christ the Risen Lord.

Members of the Church live and work with one another in a fellowship of love created by God. That fellowship is not just something we hope for or create out of our own intention. It is willed by God and made by God. The Church is a sacred communion. By virtue of baptism and through faith, we belong to the Church: we are in communion with Jesus Christ the Lord, and we are in communion with all who have been baptized and all who believe in Jesus. Before it can be a structure with its hierarchical leadership, the Church is Communion.

See: The *Catechism*: #946-962

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