

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

4th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Jeremiah 1.4-5, 17-19)

The Prophet Rejected

Jeremiah was given a tough assignment. His task was to proclaim doom to his fellow citizens under the threat of invasion by the overwhelming might of Babylon. Unless they returned to God and put their trust in the Lord rather than in their own feeble manoeuvrings, they were doomed to slaughter and exile.

To stop the people hearing this message their leaders arrested him and dumped him in the squelchy mud of an almost empty well, fed on one loaf a day.

It is only too human to block out the message one does not want to hear. So, while Jeremiah steadfastly held his ground, Babylon advanced, destroyed the city and Temple of Jerusalem, and led the people into exile. Bruised in exile, they learnt the hard way. As Jeremiah put it, God took from them the heart of stone and gave them a heart of flesh, to respond not just as a nation, but individually in tenderness and love.

Jeremiah's steadfast preaching in the face of opposition is presented to us as a preparation for that of Jesus, which we hear in today's gospel reading.

Question:

What parts of Jesus' message do we just not want to hear?

Second reading:

(1 Corinthians 12.31-13.13)

Authentic Love

The Christians of Corinth saw that they had a variety of gifts and talents. Paul gladly admits this. He only complains that this led them to squabbling and rivalry, for they were blind to the reasons for which these gifts had been given.

Like all our talents, and especially those of interpersonal relationships, they were given by the Spirit that gives life to the Christian community. Their ultimate purpose is not to puff up the holder of the gift but to build up the community. The gift must be applied and exercised in love, for love is the highest gift of all gifts. Love alone builds the community.

Then Paul paints a picture of what real love is. Few of us can read or listen to it without realizing our own failures and selfishness, as Paul puts his finger on one after another of our own failures.

The passage acts as a testing ground of whether our love is genuine or whether we are merely deceiving ourselves. The final part of Paul's argument is also encouraging, not merely because of the durability and long-lasting nature of love, but also from the picture of heaven it conveys: in the perfect maturity, to which we look forward, there will be nothing left but love

Question:

Can you hold up this passage and get a meter reading on your loves?

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Gospel:

(Luke 4.21-30)

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

The reaction of the villagers of Nazareth to Jesus' proclamation of Good News for the poor, the handicapped and disadvantaged is predictable. We have all suffered from failure of our own people to recognize our talents! In this case, it is also fuelled by a paradoxical jealousy: in the moment of rejecting Jesus' message they also want to reap the advantage of his miraculous healings.

The rejection of Jesus by his own people provokes Luke to continue the lesson to an extent not given by Mark or Matthew: Jesus quotes instances that show God's care for those outside his traditional 'Chosen People'. God's love is universal, not limited by ethnic or any other boundaries. The Chosen People were chosen not for their own selfish privilege but to bring salvation to the whole world. In the same way, in the New Dispensation of Christ, his people, the Church, are chosen not just to enjoy God's benefits and love for themselves, but as the instruments of his love for all.

It is the same message as that of Paul: true love has no limits. Luke is especially aware that Jesus sends his message beyond the limits of the Chosen People. I have been chosen not for my own advantage but as an instrument to bring Christ to others.

Question:

Does God love some people more than others?
