

Cycle C 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1, Jer 38:4-6, 8-10

In those days, the princes said to the king: “Jeremiah ought to be put to death; he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such things to them; he is not interested in the welfare of our people, but in their ruin.” King Zedekiah answered: “He is in your power”; for the king could do nothing with them. And so they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Prince Malchiah, which was in the quarters of the guard, letting him down with ropes. There was no water in the cistern, only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud.

Ebed-melech, a court official, went there from the palace and said to him: “My lord king, these men have been at fault in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah, casting him into the cistern. He will die of famine on the spot, for there is no more food in the city.” Then the king ordered Ebed-melech the Cushite to take three men along with him, and draw the prophet Jeremiah out of the cistern before he should die.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 40:2, 3, 4, 18

R. (14b) Lord, come to my aid!

I have waited, waited for the LORD, and he stooped toward me.

R. Lord, come to my aid!

The LORD heard my cry. He drew me out of the pit of destruction, out of the mud of the swamp; he set my feet upon a crag; he made firm my steps.

R. Lord, come to my aid!

And he put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God. Many shall look on in awe and trust in the LORD.

R. Lord, come to my aid!

Though I am afflicted and poor, yet the LORD thinks of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, hold not back!

R. Lord, come to my aid!

Reading II, Heb 12:1-4

Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

Gospel, Lk 12:49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

August 2007 Deacon Bill and I were commiserating about today's readings a few days ago. We read about Jeremiah being thrown into a cistern left to die...St. Paul telling us about struggling against sin, but not yet resisting to the point of shedding blood...and, about a not very peaceful Jesus ranting about the division He will cause even among family members. I think I now know why Father John agreed to our preaching this Sunday☺ Where is the loving and merciful God in these readings?

I want to tell you a little secret. When I was in formation to become a Deacon, my homiletics teacher responded to a question about what the theme was of that day's readings. He said, "That's simple. There is only one theme in the readings everyday. It is that God loves us." That's why if you ever heard one of my homilies, you know that I always explain what I saw in the reading that shows that God loves us. I have said it in every one of the homilies I preached in the last 5 years so I wouldn't forget...that we wouldn't forget...that God loves us first and foremost above all else. With confidence and the prayer from today's Responsorial Psalm, "Lord, come to my aid," I began searching in today's readings for the loving and merciful God....and, I found Him.

Today's readings continue the focus on discipleship started last week, particularly the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. God loves us so much that when He calls us to be His disciple, He tells it like it is. Our commitment to the values and principles of our faith won't be appreciated by everyone, and in fact could lead to ridicule or worse. Maybe even members of our own families won't agree with us. But He doesn't just leave us there. He knows we can't do it on our own. So He stoops down and draws us out of the pit that we find ourselves in, like He did for Jeremiah in the 1st reading. He puts loving people in our lives like the 2nd reading said, "a great cloud of witnesses." These people are examples of perseverance in life's struggle and who show us the value of being committed to our faith. These are people who know how to live their lives in heroic ways....most times in seemingly insignificant ways that nevertheless can have a lasting impact. These are the people God wants us to be. This is how He accomplishes extraordinary things.

Last Sunday I attended a small dinner honoring Father Meres from Haiti. I searched his face trying to imagine the hard life that he and the people in Bassin-Zim live...for me I think it would be an unbearable life. I wondered what moved the people in our Haiti Ministry and their extended friends to go to that awful place called Haiti? They were inspiring as they told about numerous experiences...which I saw as how they shared their unselfish commitment to others....and also, how the poor in Haiti ministered to them. I learned some simple things and bigger things that people do when they visit Haiti....it is never enough, but somehow the people there understand and are so grateful. Like giving little bars hotel soap that the people save to use only for very special occasions. Or the suitcase full of flattened soccer balls and an air pump that got the children very excited when were told that the oldest in the group would keep the ball, but it was for everyone to use. We all laughed when they sang the jingle about brushing your teeth that a friend from St. Monica's composed because he was concerned about their health, but also he knew how proud the Haitians are to have a BIG smile on their face...now it is heard on the radio all over the country and has impacted countless lives. Others commented how some more of us will have to go there to make sure the new Parish Hall was properly built. Needless to say I got caught up in the moment. I told Father Meres that he, and God, were my witnesses that I was coming to Haiti....so who is going to come with me in February or March? ☺

So you see our loving and merciful God was in today's readings...he prompted Ebed-melek to get Jeremiah out of the cistern...He convinced St. Paul to tell us that faithful Christians are not alone, that we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and a cloud of witnesses will be with us...and finally, when we choose to be a disciple of Christ, He will challenge us to the very heart of our being, but God loves us and has a plan for who He wants us to be. This is how He accomplishes extraordinary things.