

Psalm 145 Jeremiah 26:1-15 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 St. Luke 19:41-47

For the Profit of All...Regardless

One of the most moving portraits of our Lord Jesus is surely the account of His weeping over the very city that would ultimately reject Him and put Him to death. During the first few years of His ministry, Jesus had attracted large crowds of followers, many of whom hailed Him as the long awaited Messiah. But in their minds this meant that Jesus would soon lead them in a victorious revolt against their pagan overlords and finally restore the geographical, political Kingdom of Israel to its former glory under the reigns of the great kings of old like David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah. But as time went on and Jesus continued to talk about a spiritual kingdom far greater than what they had in mind – a kingdom far greater than a mere restoration of the way things once were – and as He continued to challenge them to evaluate their very shallow spiritual lives and to rethink their convenient misinterpretation of God’s Holy Word if they were to enter into this greater spiritual kingdom, many either simply stopped following Him or they became very vocal in their opposition toward Him, or they later turned quite violent...violent enough to kill. Now, something very similar happened to Jeremiah, the prophet. He began his ministry in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, a Judean King known for his restoration of true worship in Judah. 2 Kings 22:2 tells us that this king “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and (that he) walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left (an idiom meaning that he was not one for compromise).” However, in the thirty-first year of his reign, Josiah was killed in a battle against Pharaoh Necho of Egypt and Josiah’s son, Jehoahaz was made king in his place. But the apple had fallen far from the tree and the author of 2 Kings tells us that Jehoahaz did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord, and, apparently,

Pharaoh Necho also thought as much and consequently had him imprisoned and replaced him with his brother Eliakim whom he renamed Johoiakim. But this younger brother was no better than his erring elder sibling and suddenly, Jeremiah the prophet found that his “parish” was becoming increasingly hostile. Nevertheless, he decided to continue to exercise the spiritual gift God had given to him of prophetic preaching, a decision that turned out to be rather hazardous to his health as we see in our Old Testament Lesson for today.

The message of Jeremiah in chapter 26, of which we only read a small portion this morning, comes right at the beginning of the evil puppet king Jehoikim’s reign. Now, knowing a little bit about the changed political and spiritual climate of his day, one could easily understand that Jeremiah might have been tempted to maintain a low profile or perhaps to temper his pugnacious prophecies somewhat. At least until he could figure out which way the wind was blowing, so to speak. But when the Lord told him to go stand in the temple court, the very place where all the spiritual and temporal leaders of Israel would be gathered together, He strictly commanded him not to diminish one word. Now, remember, the men he would be addressing were those who based their future...indeed, their livelihood on the prosperity of the Temple and the City of Jerusalem. So, to barge in on them and declare that if they did not stop doing what they clearly enjoyed doing, their Temple and their City would soon be overthrown as Shiloh had been, was just about as popular as me bursting into a Senate hearing declaring that the United States was soon to suffer the same fate of that of the Roman Empire barring country-wide revival.

You see, Shiloh had been the site of the original spiritual and political centre of Israel, but due to repeated disobedience, God had sent the Philistines to destroy it. Thus one can understand that the comparison between Shiloh and Jerusalem (and indeed the

Temple in Jerusalem) would be extremely offensive and most unwelcome... unwelcome enough to cause quite a negative reaction on the part of those whose consciences were rightly pricked once exposed to the Light of God's sharp soul-piercing Word. Yet, even after the elders had declared Jeremiah to be worthy of death and had laid hands on him, no doubt to fulfil that purpose, and also after he stood before the princes of Judah, this prophet did not flinch...even though he knew his life hung in a very delicate balance, he chose to obey God and to exercise his spiritual gift without compromise to the bitter end.

Now, Jeremiah was no super human...he had his moments of doubt like the rest of us...but here...at this time...he stood his ground admirably and therefore he set a good example for us to follow. You see, we all tend to want the approval of our peers regardless of how young or how old we may be. Very few of us actually enjoy being the odd ball...the only one swimming up stream, especially if our friends do not follow us. Now, of course there are some who seem to delight in being different regardless of how ludicrous that being different might be, but we are talking about normal human beings here. We all like to fit in...to be one of the crowd, don't we? Those of us who are clergy are no different. It is very tempting to go with the flow when it appears that to stand firm on God's Word may be lead you down into the white water and the rocky rapids...especially when property, large salaries, comfortable retirement plans, large congregations and so on are at stake.

But this is not acceptable to our Lord. To diminish one word of His to save our own skin is a betrayal of the worst kind and it is sheer cowardice. Jeremiah certainly did not compromise. And neither did Jesus. Jesus could have looked out over the city of Jerusalem and turned away. He knew what they were about to do to Him...He knew that they would hail Him king one moment and then, when it turned out that He was

not about to do what they wanted Him to do, namely overthrow the Romans, they would turn on Him like rabid dogs and crucified Him. He knew that and yet He boldly rode into Jerusalem, into the Court of the new Temple, and spoke as crisply and clearly as Jeremiah did so many years before. “It is written, ‘My house is a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” The most interesting thing about this quote is that it is made up of two quotations taken from Jeremiah’s prophecies. (The last part has often been misquoted as a reason why no money should exchange hands on church property, but if you want to know the real meaning, go read it in context in Jeremiah 7.) But by quoting from Jeremiah, Jesus was effectively making a statement as offensive to His audience as the statement made by Jeremiah to his.

Citing Jeremiah was as bad as comparing Jerusalem to Shiloh because it was basically saying that unless they amend their ways, they would go into exile as surely as Judah did so many years before. And their reaction to Jesus’ message was as negative as that of the elders towards Jeremiah. In verse 47b of St. Luke 19, we read that the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Jesus. But the point I wish to make this morning is that knowing that His words would no doubt solicit a violent reaction did not stop Jesus from speaking the truth. Like Jeremiah, He did not diminish one word.

Then we also have the example of St. Paul. In our Epistle reading for today, the Apostle made it very clear that the spiritual gifts he was talking about are given for the profit of all...not just for the profit of the individuals who happen to possess them...the gifts of God are given to us to use to achieve His intended purpose. To use them at random only when it is convenient or to diminish them or to not use them at all is as disobedient as Jeremiah refusing to speak or as Jesus turning away from Jerusalem. Such behaviour would most certainly not be in keeping with that of the

author of this Epistle as we all well know that St. Paul continued to preach the truth about Jesus regardless of ill treatment and that he later continued on his final journey to Jerusalem in spite of the many prophetic warnings and tearful entreaties he received along the way. And even when faced by a murderous mob, he still continued to preach the truth about Jesus.

Now, I want you to think about how different things might have been had they and others like them compromised the truth. Many of the Babylonian Exiles, like Daniel, remembered Jeremiah's words while in captivity and, because of those prophetic utterances, they prayed with confidence that God might bring His righteous remnant back to the land. Had Jesus chosen not to continue down the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem and if He had not chosen to drink the bitter cup of self-sacrifice we would all still be dead in our trespasses and sins. And had St. Paul decided to play the coward, Festus, Felix and other Roman leaders, even those in Caesar's household, might never have heard the Gospel. These three all stood firm and used their gifts unflinchingly so that many others might profit by what they heard and observed.

Now, in application, tell me, dearest brethren, are there some who might profit from you using the gifts God has given to you if you would only use them? Or, put another way, are there some who might be harmed should you choose to hide your light under your proverbial pail? One and the same Spirit has distributed gift to all God's children as He sees fit to be used for the profit of the whole body. No one gift is less needed than another...just as every cell in my body, no matter how tiny or seemingly insignificant, is needful if all are to work together to make me a healthy human being...and we know what happens when one or more cells cease to do what they were designed to do...

So, consider this, dearest brethren, especially as you come to partake of the greatest gift ever given to mankind. Or perhaps it may be more appropriate to ask you to consider Him Who is that gift...consider Him Who never diminished any direction given to Him by His Father, even though He knew full well where that direction would take Him. And, indeed, consider the message of the Eucharist...consider it in the light of your life...and then consider that most solemn declaration we make after the prayers of consecration and oblation...the part where we offer up ourselves, our souls and our bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice to God. Consider those words. What do those words mean to you today, especially as you reflect on the way you live your life at present. What does it mean for you to present yourself as an offering to the Lord? What does it mean in the light of His offering portrayed in the Eucharist?

And then consider the Lord's command to Jeremiah, not to diminish one word of God in any way. Consider our Lord Jesus' words in Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed. "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done." And then, also consider the reminder of St. Paul, that the manifestation of the Spirit through the gifts He has given to each one of us is meant to be used for the profit of all. Then ask Him to Whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid, ask Him to show you how to offer up yourself so that your life, your words, your deeds might become a living sacrifice to Him for the sake of all.