

Lenten Reflections

March 20, 2019



There is an obvious parallel between Jeremiah's situation in the first reading and Jesus' in Matthew's gospel. Jeremiah was pointing out to his listeners the hypocrisy, injustice, and apathy that he saw in his 7th century B.C. Judean society. As a consequence of speaking out, Jeremiah is essentially put on trial for daring to criticize his people's laxity in following God. It is Jeremiah's directness which probably provoked the crowds to actually plot to get rid of him. "Let us destroy him by his own tongue; let us carefully note his every word." (Jer. 18:18) What was at stake here was not only the façade of the Israelites' dedication to YHWH, but their comfortable lifestyle - a lifestyle which reflected their own self-interest.

Jesus, too, experienced this public condemnation not only by the political and religious leaders who ruled with an attitude of self-righteousness, but, at times, by his own apostles who themselves were vying for power. Jesus responds with what they must have heard as a startling reversal of traditional wisdom. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave." In Jesus' kingdom there is no room for self-promotion or self-aggrandizement. In fact, the greatest leaders are those who serve with humility and lead by their example.

Times have changed, but human nature has not. There are many leaders who rule with an iron fist, comfortable in their self-righteousness and intolerant of anyone who dares to criticize them. But we all have these tendencies and we need to keep them in check. Those of us of a "certain age" might remember being given a grade in primary school labelled, "accepts correction." What a wonderful category. It taught us that we all make mistakes and need someone to point them out to us. Jeremiah and his fellow prophets were tasked

with doing just that. Jesus took it upon himself to correct the leadership style that relied on pomp and self-righteousness (that is still around today). If only Jeremiah's audience and the Roman and Jewish leaders of Jesus' time had been instructed to graciously "accept correction" as children...and if only we could remember to do it daily.

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Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

Lectionary: 232

Reading 1 [Jer 18:18-20](#)

The people of Judah and the citizens of Jerusalem said,
"Come, let us contrive a plot against Jeremiah.
It will not mean the loss of instruction from the priests,
nor of counsel from the wise, nor of messages from the prophets.
And so, let us destroy him by his own tongue;
let us carefully note his every word."

Heed me, O LORD,
and listen to what my adversaries say.
Must good be repaid with evil
that they should dig a pit to take my life?
Remember that I stood before you
to speak in their behalf,
to turn away your wrath from them.

Responsorial Psalm [Ps 31:5-6, 14, 15-16](#)

R. (17b) **Save me, O Lord, in your kindness.**

You will free me from the snare they set for me,
for you are my refuge.

Into your hands I commend my spirit;
you will redeem me, O LORD, O faithful God.

R. **Save me, O Lord, in your kindness.**

I hear the whispers of the crowd, that frighten me from every side,
as they consult together against me, plotting to take my life.

R. **Save me, O Lord, in your kindness.**

But my trust is in you, O LORD;

I say, "You are my God."

In your hands is my destiny; rescue me
from the clutches of my enemies and my persecutors.

R. **Save me, O Lord, in your kindness.**

Verse Before the Gospel [Jn 8:12](#)

I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
whoever follows me will have the light of life.

Gospel [Mt 20:17-28](#)

As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem,
he took the Twelve disciples aside by themselves,
and said to them on the way,
"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem,
and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests
and the scribes,
and they will condemn him to death,
and hand him over to the Gentiles
to be mocked and scourged and crucified,
and he will be raised on the third day."

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus with her sons
and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something.
He said to her, "What do you wish?"
She answered him,
"Command that these two sons of mine sit,
one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom."
Jesus said in reply,
"You do not know what you are asking.
Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?"
They said to him, "We can."
He replied,
"My chalice you will indeed drink,
but to sit at my right and at my left,
this is not mine to give
but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."
When the ten heard this,
they became indignant at the two brothers.
But Jesus summoned them and said,
"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,
and the great ones make their authority over them felt.
But it shall not be so among you.
Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant;
whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.
Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve
and to give his life as a ransom for many."