

Twentieth Sunday of the Year – August 18, 2019

Jeremiah 38: 4-6, 8-10 Hebrews 12: 1-4 Luke 12: 49-63

Unfortunately we know too well the harshness and incivility that is experienced in our daily lives, especially in the political world. Perhaps we are getting used to it, even expecting it at times. The ideal, the hope, is that differences in opinion, views, political philosophies, can be shared with respect for the individuals expressing them.

This is brought to mind by what was stated in the gospel passage which we have just heard. It seems harsh and uncharacteristic. In many ways the perception of Jesus is that he is a bearer of peace and understanding. Thus, what he states today, at this stage of the journey St. Luke describes him to be on, as he and his followers near Jerusalem, seems to be puzzling and so contrary to our expectations.,

☒ The fact is that what Jesus expresses is reality. He knows what is ahead of him when he arrives in Jerusalem. He knows that what he teaches will be rejected by many. That has been experienced already. Jesus is echoing the circumstances that were described in the reading from the prophet, Jeremiah. Those who heard Jeremiah were upset by his words. The solution chosen was to eliminate him, to shut him up in a cistern where his words would go unheard. The situation of Jesus is also the source for the reflections offered by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. Jesus had to endure opposition and even death, so that we might benefit.

Jesus makes it clear that he is not here simply to make us "feel good." His words, his teaching, must be taken to heart, and genuinely affect and change us. But what he says will not be accepted. There will be harsh opposition because of the discomfort it brings, because of the challenge it presents. Like Jeremiah, he will be opposed and persecuted. He will endure the cross but he will not be defeated by it.

It is that same presence of Christ, God who came among us as a man, that we, the Body of Christ, are to make known. It is that presence that we embody which reveals the real dignity, the worth and the value that we and all others have as creatures of God, images and likenesses of our God.

We are presented, by our Faith, with this challenge. We are to realize how much each one of us is worth, as a child of our loving God. We are to live our lives in terms that value, that dignity, that each one of us has. We must recognize and extend that value and dignity to all others and to all of creation.

Jesus, as well as Jeremiah, recognized that values they proclaimed and the dignity that they extended to all of God's creation would be rejected because of the self-centeredness and stubborn self-interest which is the sinful rejection of God's goodness. Our lives are to declare what our Faith affirms. Living in a manner that genuinely reflects these Gospel values is the way in which we reveal and reflect the truth of our good and gracious God.