

Serving Berlin's English-speaking Catholic Community since 1957



Catholic Community

Member of the English-Speaking Mission

Mass: Fridays at 6 p.m. in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel

Sundays at 10 a.m. in the main Sanctuary

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Office Hours: Mondays and Thursdays 10-12

July 2nd, 2017 – Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Celebrant: Fr Sylvester Ajunwa

Readings (Missal p 177 et seqq.): 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16 • Ps 89:2-3, 16-19 • 1 Rom 6:3-4, 8-11 • Mt 10:37-42

TWELFTH Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's first reading is from what I regard as the Bible's most depressing chapter: Jeremiah 20.

As we hear in chapters 10-20, the prophet actually dares confront Yahweh about his problems. Though Jeremiah is convinced he is one of Yahweh's spokespersons, his enemies not only treat him like dirt – some have even put out contracts on his life – but Yahweh lets them get by with it.

To correctly understand the depth of Jeremiah's complaints it's important to note that during the 7th and 6th centuries BC, the prophet can't fall back on the two safety nets we frequently employ today in parallel situations. First, he has no belief in a heaven or hell. He can't say, "They'll get 'theirs' after they die; while I'll get 'mine.'" People's actions were rewarded or punished in this life only. The afterlife offered neither reward nor punishment. Second, there's no concept of a devil as we know it. In many situations, Yahweh causes good and evil. In Exodus 7:3, for instance, God actually tells Moses he'll "harden Pharaoh's heart" so he won't let the Chosen People leave Egypt? How do you deal with a God who actively works against what he/she tells you to do and admits it?

In today's passage Jeremiah can only fall back on his conviction that Yahweh will come to his aid, though at this point there's no sign, he/she will do so in time for the prophet to actually "witness the vengeance you take on them." It doesn't do the prophet any good if Yahweh avenges him five minutes after he dies. In some sense, his praising Yahweh for "rescuing the life of the poor from the power of the wicked" is a little like whistling in the dark. Further along in this chapter, when his pain becomes unbearable, he'll demand to know why he was even born!

Because of the two safety nets I mentioned above, we don't have to suffer in the way Jeremiah suffered in his relationship with Yahweh. Yet, in other ways we still feel insignificant when it comes to God – or the risen Jesus – relating to us. To quote Deutero-Isaiah, we're nothing but a bunch of maggots, maggots who will eventually get into heaven if we follow all the proper rules and regulations, but still not very important individuals.

Perhaps that's why we should listen carefully to today's other two readings.

Paul certainly operates off the idea that we're very important people, not necessarily because of what we've accomplished, but because Jesus thought us important enough to die for. He reminds the Christian community in Rome of one of his most compelling beliefs. "If by the transgression of the one (Adam) the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many." If Jesus is convinced we're significant, how can we disagree?

Fifteen or more years later, Matthew still thinks it's necessary to remind his church of their importance. They're the special people entrusted to "proclaim from the housetops" the message they've received from the risen Jesus. Should they have doubts about being so privileged, the evangelist points out that the one who takes such good care of sparrows will certainly take care of them. (Considering my baldness, I normally ignore commenting on God counting the hairs of my head. Doesn't take him/her long to carry that out.)

Maybe the most serious sin we can commit isn't denying that God exists, but denying that God actually cares for us. Our biblical authors are convinced that if God exists, then God cares. If Jeremiah, with all his problems, never went far enough to definitively deny God's care, then who are we to question it?

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Roger Vermalen Karban

Welcome to All Saints! Many of us are gone for the summer and return in August but would like to welcome you to our community.

Have a great summer everyone!

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