

Holy Spirit Province

PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

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TRUSTING GOD NO MATTER WHAT: 12TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (A)

I wonder have you ever become involved in a project that you thought was worth doing because of how it would benefit others? Then, after starting it, you have come to realize that your involvement has become more difficult than you first thought. The hours you put in, the interruptions to your usual routine, the amount of energy and concentration you bring to it, the frustrations and set-backs you experience, have been eating into your spare time. You have no “me-time” left. So you start to say to yourself, and friends have started to say to you, “Your project is taking over your whole life!”

Or else, perhaps your efforts to do good, either in your parish community or your local community, have stirred up opposition from some group, that is absolutely determined to keep things just the way they are. “Don’t rock the boat,” they keep warning you. “Don’t try to do anything different.” “Don’t start anything new.” “Just back off.” But it’s too late to back off. You are so utterly convinced that all your efforts are for the good of others, and that and you must see your agenda through to the end, cost what it may.

If you can identify with any of what I’ve been saying, then the prophet Jeremiah in the First Reading today is your patron saint, the first of many people moaning and groaning to God about the rotten time they’ve been having for all their efforts. Now in temperament Jeremiah was a gentle soul. When God first called him to be God’s messenger, he protested that he was too young for the job (1:4-10). God told him not to be afraid and promised to be with him and deliver him. In his current situation, as described in the Reading, he’s going to need that deliverance, because even his friends have turned on him and been giving him a hard time.

Jeremiah has done what God asked him to do. He has accused his people of turning away from God in favour of entering into shady and shaky political alliances with their enemies. For their misbehaviour Jeremiah has predicted doom and gloom. But that doom and gloom hasn’t happened yet. So his hearers have mocked him and jeered at him, belted him up, and even put him in prison. On his release, he feels compelled to let God know how angry he is with God for the bad things he has been experiencing. On the other hand, he feels compelled to keep warning people about their need to change their ways in order to avoid the catastrophe heading their way.

Can you and I identify with Jeremiah? Do we ever feel like shaking our fists at God and shouting, “How could you let me get into this mess?” But there is more to the story of Jeremiah than his moans, groans and laments. In that part of his story that we have been hearing today, Jeremiah changes his tune. He thanks God that in all his troubles, God has been at his side, that God has been his hero and champion, and that God has been providing maximum support. So while the prophet is in solidarity with us in our disappointments and complaints, he is also urging us to keep on trusting, that no matter what we have to do and endure in our lives, God will never abandon us, and trusting too that we will even find God right there beside us.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus is just as encouraging. Don’t be afraid, he says. Don’t be frightened even of those who might murder you. For they cannot kill your soul, they cannot break your spirit. When all is said and done, the only fate to fear is ending up in hell, without God. (Jesus interpreted hell as being like “Gehenna”, literally that big rubbish dump to the south-west of Jerusalem, where fires were always burning).

Jesus is telling his followers, including you and me, that they are going to face opposition, just like he did. It will come from saying that we are Christians, that we are people for Jesus. It will come from being Jesus kind of people. It will come from walking in his footsteps, telling his truths, sharing his wisdom, and living his values and teachings.

But Jesus assures us that God will never stop taking care of us. Jesus also assures us that God is going to reward us for all our efforts to stay faithful to Jesus, no matter how much ridicule, mockery and sheer nastiness might be dumped on us for that. After all, God cares even for two sparrows that can be bought for a single coin in the market. So will he not be so much more caring of those persons who keep striving to follow Jesus his Son as closely as they can?

God is so aware of us, so much in love with us, and so much on our side, in fact, that he has counted every hair on our heads. We can trust, then, that on the Day of Judgment Jesus will acknowledge us and praise us before God. We can trust that he will remind God just how loyal and true we have been, and just how hard we have tried to live as wise and faithful servants of the Lord, even if every now and then we’ve messed up.

We are to live in hope, then, are we not? We are to stop worrying, are we not? We are to let go and let God, are we not?

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