



by Mary M. McGlone

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

June 25, 2017

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Poor Jeremiah, born into a family of priests and called to be a prophet. When Jeremiah heard God say that he had been called for this from the womb, it was like being told that his birth certificate named him “Renegade-for-life”. Nothing was ever going to be easy for this man.

What is a prophet? A prophet is someone called by God to read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. A prophet is someone deeply in touch with contemporary reality, one who is loving and courageous enough to expose what is contrary to the will of God as well as galvanize others to believe in and work to create a gospel alternative. Now that’s a job description set up to antagonize just about everybody.

All those who benefit from the status quo — authorities, clergy, the dominant race, the highly educated, the wealthy, etc.— know that prophets question their privilege, privilege which they generally believe they have earned. The privileged among us recognize prophetic words as a threat to our complacency and our comfort.

Do we wonder why people rejected Jeremiah and plotted against him? The prophetic message is just too demanding! We’ve seen it time and again. Jeremiah’s case presents what could almost be a cartoon caricature. When a scroll of Jeremiah’s

prophecy was presented to the king, the king listened to it section by section, and as each segment came to an end he borrowed a knife, cut off the part just read and threw it into the fire (Jeremiah 36). Of course, it didn't take long for even Jeremiah's friends to understand that their relationship with him might not be worth the price.

If you're not sure about the cost of listening to prophecy, look up some of the quotes from Pope Francis available on the U. S. bishops' website: www.usccb.org. Just for starters listen to Pope Francis quoting St. John Chrysostom: "Not to share one's goods with the poor is to rob them and to deprive them of life. It is not our goods that we possess, but theirs." That's a prophetic statement that lets nobody with two coats off the hook. It says that when you encounter the poor you either robe them or you rob them.

The second dimension of prophecy is the too often forgotten task of promoting real alternatives. This dimension of the prophetic vocation offers an interpretation of the charge Jesus gives us in today's Gospel: "What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light." How often do we hear a nearly inaudible voice prod us with some version of those most disturbing questions: "Isn't there another possibility? Does it always have to be this way?" These are quite often the questions of young people whose experience has not yet taught them to capitulate to "the way things really work" and who have not yet accumulated so much that they feel they must protect it. The moment we find ourselves resisting such questions we need to ask ourselves what we fear, what have we allowed to come into our lives and fetter our hopes?

More importantly, we need to ask ourselves what we honestly believe about "the way things really work." That's Paul's subject in today's selection from Romans. He begins by talking about "the way it is" — sin and death seem to rule our world. Then he challenges his people to ask themselves if they believe that Christ has really made a difference. Paul admits that the contagion of evil has infected everyone, but he asserts that the grace of God, the gracious gift of Jesus Christ, has more than overcome the way of the world.

In today's Gospel Jesus sends the apostles out to preach the coming of the kingdom of heaven in word and deed. He knows they will encounter resistance and even life-threatening opposition. Thus, he starts and finishes the core of his instructions by saying "do not be afraid." Halfway in between those two statements he explains that those who kill the body have very limited power; the real danger comes from those who can suffocate the human spirit. The latter are the ones the prophets rail against,

even at the cost of their lives.

Today's readings call us to reconsider our Christian vocation. Each of us was baptized to share in Christ's prophetic ministry. That means we need to stop and ask ourselves if we are willing to step into the space where the way of the world contradicts the Gospel and say "It doesn't have to be this way." It means we must love our world enough to be part of making it what God created it to be. Accepting the call to prophecy means that, like Jeremiah, we are accepting the role of speaking and acting as renegades for life.

JEREMIAH 20:10-13

If you know people who think they would like to be prophets, tell them to read the Book of Jeremiah. If that doesn't cure them, nothing will. Today's first reading comes from Jeremiah's "fifth confession," the cry of a disgruntled, impassioned man struggling with faithfulness. Jeremiah's confessions are perhaps best summarized by the interior conflict he described just before the beginning of today's reading. Jeremiah complains: "The word of the Lord has brought me reproach and derision all day long. I say I will not mention him ... but then it is as if fire is burning in my heart ... I grow weary holding back, I cannot!" (Jeremiah 20:8-9).

Like most true prophets Jeremiah protested his call from the beginning. Although he cried "I am too young!" God's response was that he had been called from his mother's womb — a statement that nullified age as a valid impediment. Jeremiah may be most famous for his semi-blasphemous accusation that God had seduced him into prophecy. Jeremiah chose the word seduction very purposefully as an expression of his passion and sense of deception. The vocation to prophecy promised little prestige and even less success. Love of God, of God's word and of God's people were Jeremiah's only motivations. Yet, the people rejected him, the word never seemed to be effective and Jeremiah didn't feel that God was doing anything to vindicate him.

As we listen to Jeremiah's confession/complaint, we are reminded of just how honest Jewish prayer can be. When the prophet or psalmist feels abandoned or betrayed, politeness and even conventional reverence are overrun by torrents of emotion that leave not one grievance unspoken, not one moan or sigh stifled. These are the prayers of people so intimately involved with God that they can say exactly what they think and feel, knowing God will hear them out. Once Jeremiah has expressed

every bit of his sorrow and anger, he then can express his trust in God. As in Psalm 22 which Jesus prayed from the cross, Jeremiah accuses God of abandoning him and mourns the cruelty of his enemies and the betrayal of his friends. But as Psalm 22 moves from despair to hope and faith, Jeremiah, too, ends his prayer with a song of trust that God will rescue him and exact justice in due time.

Jesus and the disciples he sent on mission would have been familiar with Jeremiah's passionate story. As faithful Jews they would have understood, at least intellectually, that the cost of speaking God's word includes receiving an ample share of opposition; the people will be no more receptive to the prophet than to the God who sent him to preach reform. But Jesus and his disciples, lovers of God like Jeremiah, would have found themselves impelled to preach, no matter the cost. As God's beloved ones, they, too, would have encountered God's presence with them ever more deeply in their darkest moments.

ROMANS 5:12-15

These four long verses have engendered pages and pages of commentary, theology and catechetical instruction. Did Paul teach the doctrine of original sin here? The biblical scholar Douglas Moo (*The Epistle to the Romans*) takes the easy way out on that question by saying that the exegete does not deal with dogma, but with the received text. If we approach this reading from that point of view we can attempt to understand Paul's message and apply his theological anthropology to our own day on the basis of just what he says.

Paul is addressing one of the most basic questions of religion: how evil came to be so prevalent in a good creation. He looks to the Genesis myth, which he probably took literally, and concludes that Adam introduced sin and death into all of creation. From that perspective we can read the Book of Genesis as the first history of sin and its effects, and also God's consistent saving response.

Some contemporary theologians offer a social perspective on the spread of Adam's sin. They posit that once sin has come into the world, no one is free from its contagion. We find an explanation of this in {a document written in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace called} *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church* (#119) . Therein, we read that "The consequences of sin perpetuate the structures of sin ... which grow stronger, spread and become sources of other sins" {(#119)}. Examples of structures of sin include racism, materialism,

an all-consuming profit motive, and the drive for power. We can easily see how these institutionalized instances of sin bring death and deform the human spirit. These and other sinful attitudes and structures are as visible and powerful in our world as their historical counterparts were in Paul's {day}.

But a focus on sin misses the major point that Paul is trying to make. He mentions sin and death not only because of their power to thwart human thriving, but much more importantly because he is offering the solution. While the problem might appear overwhelming, the gift of God is invincible. Paul believes and proclaims that Christ's life, death and resurrection have transformed reality in such a way that alternative structures have become possible.

Paul understands the Christian community as the alternative to what John calls "the world." No longer bound to Adam's trajectory, those who are open to the grace of God through Jesus are free from death, and thus from anything else that would constrain them. They are, in Paul's words, a "new creation" through whom God's intended future for the world can come to fruition (2 Corinthians 5:17).

MATTHEW 10:26-33

After our 50 days of Easter and two solemnities, today's Gospel thrusts us into the middle of Jesus' discourse about mission. The opening line is the most important: "Fear no one." If this were the Gospel of John, the next step would probably be a discourse on the truth that makes us free. But, Matthew is concerned about more concrete matters.

One dimension of Jesus' instructions in this passage is the reversal of the "messianic secret" (Matthew 16:20). Instead of warning his disciples to "tell no one," Jesus now says there is no such thing as restricted access to the good news. When Jesus told people not to tell anyone what they thought of him or asked them not to publicize the news about a sign he had worked, it was generally because they didn't fully understand it. They would be likely to proclaim him as their style of messiah or a wonder-worker, not as the messenger of God that he had been sent to be.

When the apostles are sent to proclaim the nearness and coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, they have been commissioned to do the works that Jesus has done. The very fact that Jesus could and did freely share his power demonstrates what kind of a savior he was. He sought the reign of heaven, not the spotlight.

Jesus commissioned the apostles and told them how to travel light and become a part of the communities they were to visit. Then, he immediately warned them about the job: he was sending them out as lambs among the wolves; they would be labeled as minions of the devil. What an introduction to his injunction, “Fear no one.”

Clearly, the disciples’ lack of fear can’t be based on external evidence or on naiveté. Jesus sends them out fully aware of what they are facing. But, even more than that, he makes them fully aware of the content of their message. They are being sent to proclaim what they have heard and to do what they have seen. They are to share what has sparked their hopes and deepened their faith. By giving them his mission, Jesus pushes them into the necessary next step of discipleship. It’s one thing to stand by and admire what Jesus says and does, it’s quite another to say and do the same. But, the reality is that only by taking up the mission can they be disciples. Jesus is not a one-man show. Anybody who wants to watch from the sidelines will never be more than a spectator. Being part of the dynamic of the coming of the reign of heaven requires active participation.

There is a mystery to this dynamic. Jesus preached God’s unconditional love and invited everyone to receive it. The trick is that we can only receive that love by risking everything else, as he said, by losing our life to save it. Apostles will know the love of God and the coming of the kingdom only to the extent that they give themselves to it. In knowing the love of God they will be impelled to share it. When they are dismissed and persecuted, they will understand that as an experience of solidarity with God and of God with them. Like fledgling sparrows learning to fly, they will set off behind their master trusting that the Father of Jesus will care for them as he had for Jesus himself. They will not be afraid.

Planning: 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Lawrence Mick

We have been in Ordinary Time for two weeks already but this is the first Sunday we go back to green vestments and leave behind the solemnities that follow Easter. This is the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time, so mark the Mass books properly.

In today’s second reading, St. Paul offers us a crucial truth that could well be our theme for all of Ordinary Time and beyond. “For if by the transgression of the one

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.” What an important and central truth of our faith! And yet, I suspect, few Catholics really know that God’s grace is stronger and more prevalent than sin. We still labor under the weight of centuries of over-emphasis on sin and guilt as a way to push people into moral behavior. We have been much less focused on pulling people toward good behavior by reminding them of God’s love for them and for all people.

Planners might take some time to read this passage from St. Paul and discuss what it means in their lives. Then consider how you can help the parish to grow beyond fear and guilt to a deep awareness of God’s grace in their lives. Gratitude for these gifts of God should be the motivation for our lives. It is also the basis for our worship, especially the Eucharist. If we really feel grateful to God, then worship becomes a joy rather than an obligation. If we are really grateful for all we have received, then we naturally open our hearts to share God’s gifts with those in need.

One way, then, to discern where your assembly falls on this spectrum is to ask yourselves how joyful and exuberant your worship is and how clearly that worship leads to service to others. Both of these things are crucial for evangelizing others. When people see Christians sharing God’s love in service, they are attracted to Christ. When they come to worship and find a vital community, they are attracted to the church.

If our church assemblies are shrinking, we need to ask ourselves why people do not see God’s love and presence through us. There can be many external reasons, of course. People are distracted by many things and shaped by a consumer culture that is ultimately self-centered. But it cannot be denied that the attitudes and actions of many Christians play a role in turning people away from the church. Most people are not attracted by those who spend their energy judging and condemning others. That’s why Pope Francis called for the Year of Mercy; that year is over, but the task of proclaiming God’s mercy continues.

Prayers: 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Joan DeMerchant

Introduction

Suffering is real, even for those who are called by God. The prophets, the disciples, Christians from the very beginning often paid a price for responding to the call. We may understand this more readily in times of persecution or political unrest or observe it in other faith traditions. When have we had to overcome fear because of our faith? Even choosing to live a Gospel life may overwhelm us. Fear is death-dealing, and all great spiritual teachers counsel against it. Jesus said it often: Don't be afraid.

Penitential Act

- Lord Jesus, you counseled your disciples to speak and act boldly: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you assured them of God's love for them: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you call us, too, to live our faith without fear: Lord, have mercy.

Prayer of the Faithful

Presider My friends, let us pray now for all who live with any kind of fear.

Minister For the whole church: that we may have the courage to live the Gospel and reject fear...we pray,

- For those at risk for supporting believers in other faith traditions, especially Judaism and Islam...we pray,
- For a world at peace and free from any kind of fear...we pray,
- For those who use fear for personal, religious, political or economic reasons...we pray,
- For those who are debilitated by fear, or who do not know how to help the fearful...we pray,
- For those dedicated to helping others overcome bullying or fear...we pray,
- For those whose work or personal commitments require extraordinary courage; for all who take risks for others...we pray,
- For people in this community who live in quiet fear or whose needs create ongoing fear...we pray,
- For the sick, the dying and the grieving among us...we pray,

Presider God, our strength, we thank you for sending your son to show us how to live boldly for others. Help is to be patient with those who are afraid and courageous in the face of those who promote fear. May we remember that you are with us always, loving and protecting us. We ask these things in Jesus' holy name, amen.

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Cycle A Sunday Resources** feature series. [View the full series.](#)