

“When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were filled with fury!”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, as you probably know, there was a prophet by the name of Jeremiah. Someone described a biblical prophet as...

“One who comforted the disturbed and disturbed the comfortable.”

Jeremiah was just such a prophet. He lived at a time when Israel was being threatened from within & from without. From within... by all sorts of corruption. And from without... by a military superpower. He accepted God’s call to be his representative, his ‘spokesperson,’ albeit with great reluctance.

So, Jeremiah began to preach. He took it quite seriously. He told the people, point-blank, that their only hope of survival was to reform their lives and to turn to God.

Well, let me tell you, this did NOT ‘go over’ very well. He angered the people, who said in effect,

“Who does Jeremiah think he is...passing judgment on us, his own countrymen?”

Things got ‘bad’ --once the authorities flogged Jeremiah publicly. On another occasion, they put him in stocks. On a third occasion, they threw him in a dark, dank, dungeon for a while.

Not unlike Jeremiah, Jesus, also, was a prophet, also in his own country, doing his ‘job,’ so to speak, a bit too well. He, too, experienced rejection from the religious leaders, as well as from friends.

For example, today’s Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Luke, shows us what happened when Jesus preached his very first sermon in his hometown.

When Jesus stood up in his home-town-synagogue and told friends & neighbors that:

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me”

And that he, in his presence & in his works, was fulfilling the sacred scriptures, they... were... shocked! A wave of disbelief swept across the church. They began to whisper to one another:

“Isn’t this Joseph’s son? Isn’t he like us, just a poor villager of Nazareth? Who does he think he is, pretending to be a prophet? Where’s his credentials that he’s God-appointed, not merely self-appointed”

These ‘whispers’ became more pervasive. Soon, they became shouts. Then... all ‘Hades’ broke loose. It blew up and out of control. And, as I just read to you from Luke’s Gospel:

“They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which the town had been built, to hurl him down headlong.”

Luke’s description of Jesus’ first preaching experience in Nazareth brings the starry-eyed Christian back down to earth quickly and with a sudden thud.

BUT...as we think about this episode, even meditate on it, place ourselves, in our mind’s eye, there, we would do well to recall the disturbing prophesy of that old man in the temple, Simeon, when he uttered those words over the infant-Jesus, 30 years earlier:

“This child... is a sign that will be contradicted.” Lk.2:34

Those ‘Simeon-words’ would reverberate throughout our Lord’s entire preaching ministry. Religious leaders, forever, challenged his orthodoxy; Pharisees accused him of being the devil’s instrument. ^{Mt. 12:24} Just as the townspeople of Nazareth tried to kill him, so the townspeople of Jerusalem would shout, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him.’ And they would have their way with him... with a little help from Rome!

So-o-o, perhaps 'interesting,' BUT... **"How's all this apply to us?"** you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

Jesus made the application himself. He said to his disciples:

"If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first! No slave is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." Jn. 15:18, 20

Anyone, who tries to live a Christian life today, knows how true this is.

For example, ask young people, in high school or college, what happens when they try to remain honest in an exam when others around them are cheating.

For example, ask them what happens when they try to remain chaste at a party when others around them are 'doing otherwise,' you know... 'Getting it on! Hooking up.'

For example, ask them what happens when they speak out against abortion, when others around them are defending the right of a woman to... 'freely choose' the truncated-fate of her baby.

For example, ask them what happens when they speak out against discrimination, when others around them are 'assassinating the character of minorities,' you know... mocking and making fun of them.

AND... what happens to young people ...is also true for the rest of us.

We've all experienced rejection & persecution for our faith to some degree, at some point in our lives.

Now, just because it's hard sometimes, we can't let that keep us from being honest or chaste. We can't let it keep us from defending the rights of the defenseless-unborn or grossly-outnumbered minorities. Just because we all have to work a bit harder, as a family, to keep our Catholic School open, doesn't mean we should 'throw in the towel.' Quite to the contrary, we owe it to the 'children of tomorrow' to pass on the vision & legacy of the 'Catholic life-view,' just as our predecessors preserved that vision & legacy and handed it on to us. This is our time. And it is our turn! We only get one 'go at it.'

The reason is clear. Jesus said to his true followers, the ones that didn't 'walk away:'

"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... They do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand.... Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds (i.e., your good example) and glorify your heavenly Father." Mt.5:13-16

Our vocation as Catholic-Christians is to be prophets (i.e., spokespersons) of the Father in our world, in our time, just as Jesus was a prophet (i.e., spokesperson)--& so much more--of the Father in his world, in his time. We can, at least, speak out with our hands & our feet...what we do, where we go, how we treat one another, give our good example. After all, folks, this is what our Baptism and Confirmation are all about!

To paraphrase the words of the great St. Paul:

"In a world of darkness, we Christians are called by God to shine like stars." Phil.2:15

I now close with this prayer:

Lord, give us your love. For sometimes, people reject us and we are tempted to hate or 'get even.'
Lord, give us your strength. For sometimes, situations get tough and we are tempted to 'throw in the towel' and just 'give up.'

Lord, give us your courage. For sometimes, the pressure gets great and we are tempted to 'give in.'

Lord, help us to be like salt for everyone, a light for the world –if only in our corner of the vineyard.

Lord, in a world, too often, of cruelty and darkness, help us to shine...shine like one of your stars!

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.