16 B 2024

In these past Sundays, we have been presented with several prophets proclaiming a burning message from God on their lips. God’s word with a human voice. In today’s first reading, Jeremiah directs his attention to the sins of shepherd-leaders who mislead and mistreat those entrusted to their care. *“I’m keeping my eye on you, keeping track of your criminal behavior,”* says the Lord. The prophets’ styles are unique and diversified; they speak with intensity.

Ours is a world drunk with power. Fear extinguishes the flame of virtue. The center of the universe is not God, but ourselves. We proclaim power is the key to fulfillment because anything else that springs up is unacceptable.

The prophets are intent on making us see the truth about ourselves. They never let up until we change, or until we make a choice. When they denounce, they go after everyone indiscriminately, but especially governments, the economy, the civil leaders as well as the religious ones. Their words sting, their prophetic activity comes out of sin, evil, injustice, collusion with systems and authority that do harm, human insensitivities, and absorption with ourselves. They lay bare our lives, down to the bone and soul. They try to break through our well-planned and smoothly running worlds, saying that we are the problem, the product of our own devices. Our culture teaches us that we are the center of the universe, not God, that we are masters of our own destiny, living not in relation to God, nor morally in relation to one another.

Our world lacks God’s brooding Spirit of love that we see on the first page of the Bible—the Spirit that hovers over the chaos—with love and condescending mercy. Pope Francis has urged the peoples of the world to get in touch with God’s silent pulse of His love that permeates actively all of creation. God brings forth all creatures in silence and non-violence. The Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral on the “Church in the Modern World” summarizes the tension under which we live, of a world that is at once powerful and weak, capable of doing what is noble and base, angelic and beastly, disposed to progress and decline, brotherhood and hatred. The pastoral ends by saying that these are of human making. And it’s up to human beings to control them or be enslaved by them.

The disciples in today’s Gospel return from a successful mission of preaching and healing, and Jesus senses that they deserve a much-needed break and a little rest. Word got around that Jesus and the disciples went off to a remote place by themselves. People from the surrounding towns and villages went out on foot, running, forming a huge crowd., deprived of hope, broken in spirit, and plagued by evil. They wanted a reason to believe. At the sight of them, Jesus felt heart-broken, love-compelled, compassionate. The need was so great and the possibility of help so rare. They wanted relief. And so, Jesus went right to work teaching them.

Jesus is the unveiling, the full revelation of God’s love involving Himself in our sufferings, miseries, and sins, to the point that He personally takes upon Himself all our brokenness. By His gift of Himself, through His free death on the cross, we are redeemed. The element of God’s very nature as love is His immense, intense, tender loving mercy, as He bends down to our miseries in order that He may take them to Himself, in order to relieve us and bring us true happiness in loving oneness with His Triune community of love.

My Augustinian professor of Systematic Theology asked us this question: “If God the Father loves the Son because Jesus makes explicit the Father’s mercy for us, is it too far-fetched that the Father also undergoes suffering, seeing Jesus freely entering into the darkness of human sinfulness and becoming a part of that for love of us? Can we not also accept the Father as a suffering servant on our behalf? Can we not suspect that if God’s very mercy for us pours out from His divine nature, such mercy calls for, not merely pity, but real compassion unto personal suffering out of God’s love for us?”

With tape recorders whirring, thank God he answered his own question: God the Father does not suffer physically, since only Jesus is God-Man. Jesus the Word by suffering for us human beings and the Spirit of God that speaks that Word cannot remain unmoved. Love cannot remain uninvolved in the suffering of the one loved. The Father is in His Word. He and the Son are one. The Word has meaning only because Jesus is the exact Image of the Father, who communicates Himself to us only in and through His Word.

The Father is always speaking his Word. Jesus is always loving us with such tender mercy unto death. He is present in our lives with the same dynamic, eternal love and mercy He had when He died to serve us by His outpouring love-unto-death. In prayer, especially in the Eucharist, we can realize that we are *now* being loved by our infinitely, merciful loving Father unto the generosity of Jesus on the cross. We, then, can meaningfully say with St Paul and a reference to St Francis, *“With Christ I am nailed to the cross. It is now no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”*

With St Francis, such an experience leads us into the awesome presence of the Father as perfect holiness, fullness of grace, beauty, love. In a word, active mercy. It begins a transformation of our lives which is a life shown in merciful service to others. And with Francis we pray the “Praises of God:” You are the holy Lord God who does wonderful things. You are strong. You are great. You are love. You are wisdom. You are humility. You are beauty. You are meekness. You are the protector. You are all our sweetness, You are our eternal life: Great and wonderful Lord, Almighty God, Merciful Savior.”