

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

(Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 69; Romans 5:12-15; Matthew 10:26-33.)

Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., St. Katharine Drexel, Blessed Theresa of Calcuta, Blessed John XXIII, Servant of God John Paul II, Timothy J. Russert, Blessed Edith Stein – what do they all share in common? They were all people of absolute integrity and lived with unquestioning openness their faith. Everyone here could name other individuals you know in your personal lives who were or are the same.

Today these scriptures, in particular, the first reading from the Book of the prophet Jeremiah and today's Gospel passage speak of this kind of integrity and they make it clear that there is a personal cost to the individual who seeks to embrace such integrity as a way of life. They speak as well of the strength necessary for one to be faithful in this regard.

Jeremiah, one of the great prophets of the Old Testament, suffered greatly because he heard the Word of God, embraced it fully and called others to live its challenge. He met great resistance because of his prophetic stance, even his friends ended up abandoning him. His life was in constant danger and yet his commitment to what God had called him was unyielding and his trust in God alone was his strength and hope. *“The Lord is with me, like a mighty champion, my persecutors...will not triumph.”* Confident that God would always be there for him Jeremiah remained steadfast in his proclaiming the Word of God.

In the Gospel we hear Jesus exhorting his disciples to stand firm in the face of the persecution and misunderstanding that they will inevitably encounter as they preach the Word of God and minister in Christ's name. *“Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known.”* The disciples are to fearlessly proclaim the Good News and to always acknowledge their commitment to Christ even though there will be a tremendous “cost to their discipleship.”

Implied here, but spoken even more forthrightly by Jesus in other Gospel passages, is the fact that the disciples will be called upon to endure hardship for the sake of His name and even suffer death at the hands of those who are threatened by their faithfulness. *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul...Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s knowledge.”*

The challenge before us always is that the Gospel message is meant for us as well. Now it is unlikely that many of us will ever be thrust into the limelight for living our faith as were the people I mentioned at the beginning of this homily, nor will we necessarily undergo the kind of suffering Jeremiah or the first disciples of Jesus endured. But because of our Baptism into Christ we are called to be His disciples. We are meant to follow the way the Gospel of Jesus Christ lays out, to live ardently the teachings of the Church and to embrace the inevitable cost that the commitment to faith entails.

As we stand for the sanctity of all life in the midst of a culture of death, as we strive for peace and justice for all in the midst of ever increasing violence and injustice, as we embrace others with respect and dignity when they are oppressed or thought of as different or less by society, as we seek to live unselfish lives in the midst of great selfishness we will pay the cost of following Jesus. Over and over in the social order, in relations between nations and people, in how great is the suffering of many around the world, in the inequity with which others must endure there is constant evidence of disdain for the teachings of Jesus.

Therefore, if we are to live with integrity what Baptism into Christ demands we must be open to being counter our culture. Like the disciples then, so we today, are to be strong, confident and steadfast in proclaiming the Word, the presence of God. The world desperately needs the Christian message and who can proclaim it but we who say we follow Christ.

Each Eucharist we celebrate around the Table of the Lord renews our faith and Baptismal commitment, so today, let us pray that our faith may continue to grow ever more vibrant, that we will commit ourselves to a continual discernment and openness to the teachings of our Church and that we will know the strength, the wisdom and the knowledge we need to “proclaim” our faith with all our hearts.