

Fourth Sunday of the Year (C)

February 3, 2019

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19  
1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13  
Luke 4:21-30

A young man had committed a robbery and had been sentenced to many years in jail. He was angry and embittered. The chaplain at the state prison, a young priest, received a request from the father of that young man. He wanted to visit with his son. The young man refused to see his father. The chaplain did his best to intervene, to plead with the young man. The inmate refused to reconsider. And yet, each week the father took off from work, boarded a bus, and traveled across the state in the hope of seeing his son.

Each week it became the chaplain's task to ask the young man, "Do you want to see your father?" He then had to bear word of the refusal to the waiting father. The father would then thank the chaplain, gather his belongings, and head toward the door for the bus trip home.

One day, after telling the father the same thing that his son would not meet with him, the chaplain said, "No one would do what you are doing. Your son is an embittered, defiant young man. Go back home and get on with your life. No one would put up with this kind of rejection, week after week. No body would do this."

"He has put up with it for centuries," the father said. "God patiently waits for us and I must not give up, but wait patiently for my son."

This story and the sacred word before us today bring to mind the great line of the Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoevsky. "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing." Love is at the very heart of the gospel message, to love in the face of every kind of challenge. Even though, love is so often demanding, harsh and dreadful, love leads us more deeply into life.

Each one of us is on a continuum, the great movement from *who I am in myself* to *who I am in God*. This is the movement of a life-time, from *the ego self* to *the Spirit self*, from *the false self* to *the true self*. This journey so often takes a life time and when we come to the end, should we not have understood, we trust the Lord will pick up the slack and carry us through.

Even though we are reading from the beginning of the book of the prophet Jeremiah, the scripture scholars suggest that the prophet's call is almost always the last element to be inserted into the prophet's oracles. Only after a lifetime of delivering God's word, the prophet receives an insight about what he or she was actually called to do. Again, the movement from self to spirit, from who I am in myself to who I am in God, so often takes a lifetime. To let go of the need to

**control our lives and to surrender to the mystery that is sustaining our lives, comes slowly and gradually.**

**In our lesson from Paul, the Corinthian community is being challenged to move from a focus on self to a focus on the other. The people of Corinth were quite gifted but there was some thing lacking and that was love. Paul uses many negative images to point out what he saw in the people. Love is not pompous. Love is not inflated. Love is not rude. Love does not seek its own self-interest. Love is not quick tempered nor does it brood over injuries or rejoice in wrongdoing. The people of Corinth were blessed and gifted. Yet, they were taking care of themselves rather than taking care of one another and building up the community.**

**When the human spirit weaves with the divine spirit, something happens within the individual and the community. Both are blessed with this gift of love, creating a bond that is genuine and that will endure. Yet, love is not some thing that can be easily described. Paul sees love as something verdant flowing from God's Spirit mending broken relationships and forming bonds of communion. Love is characterized by patience, kindness, humility, and consideration of others.**

**Through our prayer together, through the sacred word and Eucharist that we take hold of this day, may we become more the individuals and the people God calls us to be.**

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Presider: Let us pray now as people called to live God's word in every circumstance of our lives. Our response: God of love, hear our prayer!

1. For Pope Francis and all in the church who face the hard reality of those who witness to the Gospel and its call to change ... // ..... We pray ....
2. For all contemporary prophets who challenge the status quo in politics, religion, or culture, and for those afraid to hear or support them ... // ... We pray ...
3. For the United States, as the nation celebrates Black History Month, / for anyone who has suffered the scourge of racism, / for those who deny its lingering reality, / and those seeking justice for all people ... // ... We pray ...
4. For the leaders of the church who will select our new bishop, / for a greater spirit of consultation with all the people, / for wisdom and counsel in discerning the will of God ... // ... We pray ...
5. For the will and courage to practice the spiritual gifts we have been given / for the insight to value love over all things / for the prophets of our own day / for ourselves that we may surrender and trust more deeply // ... We pray ...
6. For those among us facing unwanted changes in work or health, finances or relationships, citizen status or safety ... // ... We pray ...
7. For the sick, the dying, and for those who have died \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ We pray ...

The parish community would like to support you in prayer.  
Please share with us your needs and intentions.

Presider: O God, you challenge our values and call us to change. Hear these prayers and grant us the strength and the will to embrace the gospel message. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord Jesus,

you were sent to minister to those considered outcasts:  
Lord, have mercy.

your ministry was rejected by your own people:  
Christ, have mercy.

you equip us to face the same challenges and resistance:  
Lord, have mercy.