

Ardent Discipleship



I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Jer 38:4-6, 8-10)

The Princes and the King

⁴In those days, the princes said to the king; “Jeremiah demoralizes the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such things to them; he is not interested in the welfare of our people, but in their ruin.” ⁵King Zedekiah answered: “He is in your power”; for the king could do nothing with them.

The Princes and Jeremiah

⁶And so they **took** Jeremiah and **threw him into the cistern** of Prince Malchiah, which was in the quarters of the guard, letting him down with ropes. There was no water in the cistern, only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud.

Ebed-melech and the King

⁸and Ebed-melech went there from the palace and said to him, ⁹“My lord king, these men have been at fault in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah, casting him into the cistern. He will die of famine on the spot, for there is no more food in the city.” ¹⁰Then the king ordered Ebed-melech the Cushite to take three men along with him, and draw the prophet Jeremiah out of the cistern before he should die.

THE FOCUS: The Capture and Release of Jeremiah

COMMENTARY/REFLECTIONS

The context of the reading is that the Judeans are facing a big crisis (Babylonian conquest and exile).

The powers-that-be put the blame on Jeremiah for speaking against their plans to defend their land.

Jeremiah is just speaking on behalf of God. He is a prophet.

They punish him by throwing him into a cistern (well) to languish there. Surprisingly, Jeremiah is quiet. He survives.

This is a typical example of a prophet who is not accepted by the people.

People put the blame on the man of God in stead of themselves for their country’s woes. (In the mind of the prophet, they have sinned against God. They don’t trust in God, instead they trust in men and in their little weapons and alliances with other nations.)

The reading is a warning to those who love putting blame on others for their own problems.

They will surely but unnecessarily hurt / waste an innocent prophet and man of God.

The story does not end here. Where are all these princes gone afterwards?

When that happens to us when we are bringing a message to a stiff-necked people, we pray that someone else like Ebed-melech will come to our rescue.

Ebed-melech exhibits courage to go to the authority, has a compassionate heart, a correct judgment, and a practical love.

He organizes some people to help Jeremiah out of the pit.

May we too find friends like him, in stead of those who make our lives miserable!

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 40:2,3,4,18)

LORD, COME TO MY AID!

SECOND READING (Heb 12:1-4)

¹Since we are surrounded by so great a **cloud of witnesses**, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us ²while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. ³Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

THE FOCUS: **Cloud of Witnesses**

COMMENTARY

- Here in v. 1, Cloud of witnesses. What is this?
- Those who testify to Christ, the multitude that respond to the call of God to be holy, to be blameless, to imitate Jesus.
- It is the reason for getting rid of sin.
- It is the reason for persevering in running the race.
- In v.2 “keeping our eyes fixed” on Jesus = not losing track of him.
- Jesus is recognized as leader and perfecter of faith.
- As a leader, he has a vision (the joy that lay before him, v.2).
- This vision emboldens him to endure the crucifixion.
- For this, he is now in heaven (seats at the right of the throne of God).
- As a leader, Jesus also endures opposition from sinners, to strengthen us (v.3).
- Struggle against sin has not gone yet to the point of dying (v.4) for the present Christians.

REFLECTIONS

The challenge of the author for Christians is to avoid sin.

Jesus has provided a good role model in avoiding sin.

He has a vision of the joy to come.

Thus, he endures the sufferings, shame and cross as well as opposition from sinners.

His stance should encourage us to do the same.

We can do more to conquer sin and reach heaven by shedding our blood too.

GOSPEL READING (Lk 12:49-53)

The fiery mission of Christ

⁴⁹Jesus said to his disciples, “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! ⁵⁰There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!

The question of Christ and the answer

⁵¹Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather **division**.

The result: conflict

⁵²From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

THE FOCUS: **Division**

COMMENTARY

- The reading is one of the problematic texts in the Bible.
- The sensitive layman or laywoman may be scandalized by the statements of Jesus.
- We think all the while that Jesus is here to bring peace and harmony, but alas, division and conflict.
- Here, we need to interpret properly. Our starting point is where Jesus is coming from.
- Jesus is a zealous missionary. Jesus wants to “set the earth on fire” now (to transform it according to the plan of God). (v.49)
- Fire is an agent of purification. It destroys everything to make appear what is essential to God.
- open the door to evildoers. Evildoers are the ones who eat and drink with Jesus and are seemingly taught by him but do not learn how to do good.
- The baptism here in v.50 is not the same as his baptism with John the Baptist. Baptism here is immersion in his own blood, suffering, which

would bring to completion his mission. It is his own martyrdom.

- Jesus is anguished waiting for his time to shed blood, which will complete his mission.
- Baptism recalls of water (=blood) in contrast to fire.
- Both water (blood) and fire purify.
- V.51 spells out the real mission of Christ.
- Not peace, but division.
- Again, we need a little explanation to understand this.
- We imagine the early stages of Christianity.
- In a Jewish or a Gentile home, there is no peace when one member becomes a Christian.
- When you become a Christian before, you stop from going to the synagogue or to participate in the rituals of the old religion.
- Christianity is not accepted as a religion yet at that time.
- It is regarded as superstitious, anti-social, cannibalistic, esoteric, weird, a heresy of the mainstream religion.
- No wonder it pits one against another.
- The division is the result of following Christ.
- The author is speaking from the early Christians' experience.
- The division which is caused by sin (or unprocessed personal differences, political stance) is something else.

REFLECTIONS

When we follow Jesus closely, we are not spared of conflicts and division.

This division comes as a result of choosing Jesus Christ as a source of salvation, not the old one.

No person can have both Christianity and Judaism or paganism.

One must choose one or the other. (God, not mammon)

The person is making a strong message to his loved ones when he makes a choice for Jesus.

Following Jesus is a total conversion from age old religious beliefs, traditions and culture (which gives comfort) to a new way of life (which gives more challenges and widens horizons).

It is a radical change of outlook and mentality. It hurts one's heart and loved ones. It is unsettling and fraught with danger. But it is unavoidable.

It is saying good bye to the old, but an experience of liberation to express total trust and confidence in Christ.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The First Reading talks about the sin committed against Jeremiah.

The Second Reading challenges Christians to get rid of sin.

The Gospel Reading is an eye opener on the mission of Jesus: to spread fire on earth.

It is a sin to think of him as goody goody. It is a sin to have misconception of him.

It is a sin not to choose Jesus.

How to develop your sharing/homily

What is a sin? Do we still have a sense of sin? If we have lost it, then we have a big problem.

Sin abounds in our relationships, in our families and society.

In friendship, we feel betrayed by our friends. We feel they are taking advantage of us. They are using us.

In our families, parents play favorites. They refuse to pay attention to some of their children.

In the schools, students cheat. They don't study hard, so they cheat during exams. No discipline.

In the society, the rich take advantage of the poor. They do not give them overtime pay. They withhold their salaries. They don't care if the majority wallow in abject poverty as long as they enjoy comfort and their properties are intact.

We can mention many more sins – private sins, public sins and structural sin, etc.

In the First Reading, sin is committed by the princes of Judah. They falsely accuse Jeremiah of demoralizing the people. They also sin by condemning him to the cistern.

The Second Reading exhorts Christians to get rid of sin.

How?

By fixing their eyes on Jesus (prayer, med-

itation, listening to his words, eucharist) and by enduring the cross and the opposition from sinners (those who plot against his life; those who say they are right, he is wrong; those who want to preserve their interests; those who use other people to execute him).

We may trace sin in the gospel reading in the mentality of Jesus' disciples. It is a sin to misread / misinterpret the purpose of Jesus.

To think that Jesus' message is a wishy-washy one is outrageously wrong. Jesus comes to bring fire into the world, not peace (complacency) that has nothing to do with his mission. Jesus does not come to make life comfortable to the disciples. He is here to make them work for the kingdom.

Sin is not choosing Christ, refusal to commit to Christ.

Sin has devastating effects on others and the sinner himself / herself.

Chaos / death / woundedness results when there is disinformation, slander and character assassination; in Filipino term, tsismis, feasting on what might be the faults of others. Jeremiah was a victim of this.

Arrogance and pride displace people from their rightful place and robs them of their dignity.

You can review your catechism on the 7 capital sins.

There are many other sins, like environmental destruction, consumerism, materialism, pornography, drug pushing, untruthful advertising, selling of unnecessary products, etc.

To sum up, sin is living without love of God, neighbor and creation. Sin is a compromise with the devil.

Sin is forgiven through confession, reparation and firm promise not to do it again.

The eucharist is a challenge for us to get rid of sin. We are not supposed to receive the sacred host if we are in grave sin and if we have no intention of changing our lives.

When we receive the eucharist, we are telling the Lord that we love him, our neighbors and our world.

We commit another sin (even sacrilege) if we receive the eucharist and not give up our sins.

The eucharist is an effective way to check our sinfulness.

In the eucharist, let us ask God to help us change our sinful ways so that we may be conformed to be more like him and to be enlisted in the cloud of witnesses.

-Prepared by Fr. Cielo Almazan, OFM

III. OUR CONTEXT

1. Old politicians, reelected.
2. Political dynasties still flourish
3. Floodings in some countries and in Metro Manila and in other parts of the country.
4. Pray for Christians who are trying to build just and life giving structures e.g. ecological village, etc.