

20 Sunday OT C 2016

August 13-14

Frazeo/Callaway

Mary, my Mother, I give myself totally to you as your possession and property. Please make of me, of all that I am and have, whatever most pleases you. Let me be a fit instrument, in your immaculate and merciful hands, for bringing the greatest possible glory to God. Amen.

Do you ever have trouble knowing what to believe? Sometimes the truth is elusive. Sometimes the truth is obvious, but we don't want to hear it. In the first reading today, the king encounters the word of the prophet Jeremiah. The prophet's job is simple--to deliver a message from God. The king both permits the prophet to be imprisoned and then frees him. He is having trouble knowing what to believe.

My friend Jessie is often in the same boat as King Zedekiah—Jessie doesn't know what to believe, and he lives a rather tormented life. For about a decade beginning in high school, Jessie was faithful in every way. From Sunday Mass to volunteering at the food shelf, Jessie did it all. And then, like a switch was flipped, for the next decade all things faith went out the window. Drugs, sex and rock and roll were all-consuming. From bar fights to using prostitutes, nothing was off limits for Jessie. And then one day, beaten down and hopeless, the switch flipped back. Jessie was filled with repentance and came back to the faith. The king imprisoned the prophet for speaking the truth and then listened to him. At least he listened!

Hot and cold. What Jessie and Zedekiah lived in extremes, we live by degrees. There are times when we live the faith well, and there are times when we falter and seek happiness and meaning away from the Lord. Think, for example, of how you experience Lent and Easter.

For many of us, Lent is like a decade of faithfulness. We repent of our sins, we do works of charity, we pray more and we avoid temptation. Then comes Easter and the big switch—we consume to excess everything we gave up, and temptation to old sins returns with a vengeance.

If we consider this pattern, we can see that it would be better to move our ebb and flow of faithfulness to pure faithfulness.

In today's gospel Jesus asks, "Do you think that I have come to establish peace on earth? No, I tell you, rather division." Jesus does not desire disunity in his body. Rather, he knows that the truth of the gospel causes people to react—some ignore it, some embrace it and some resent it to the point of violence.

The prophet Jeremiah spoke the truth given to him from the Lord and was accused of demoralizing the soldiers. The king and his soldiers felt judged and the judgement was deflating. In other words, if they were to listen to the truth, they could not do what they wanted to do! There is a tension between truth and sin. We encountered it the first time we were disobedient to our parents. We encounter it when we lie and when we knowingly choose sin. In these circumstances, we are faced with a choice—we either repent, or we rid our lives of the tension that comes from truth.

Zedekiah and the soldiers were not ready to repent—so they did away with the prophet. They lowered him into a cistern and left him to die. In the cistern the prophet sank into the mud. Experienced symbolically—what the people were living in reality—sin is a mire that limits our freedom and ultimately starves us of all that nourishes the soul.

When we are stuck in sin, the truth measured against our choices can feel like an unjust judgment. It feels critical and we feel demoralized.

St. Paul sums up the life of faith simply as this: resist sin. Resist it to the point of shedding blood. By this he means resist sin with all your strength. The alternative is to flirt with sin, to pretend that we do not want it in our lives, yet stay close to temptation. In doing so, we will always eventually fall. Our decade of sin may be only a few days long. The only way out is to run to Jesus.

St. Paul offers us this final encouragement: *Persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus.*