

## Fr James' homily for the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Jeremiah 20:10-13  
Second Reading: Romans 5: 12-15  
Gospel: Matthew 10:26-33



I find it weird at the moment how in one way the time of lockdown is slow and dragging, and in another way the weeks seem to speed past and here we are again in the “green” Sundays of the year, of Ordinary Time and back to our reading through the Gospel of St Matthew.

But before Matthew today we have the voice of Jeremiah the Prophet, one of the great figures of the Old Testament and, speaking as he does around the time of the disaster of the exile of the People of Israel into Babylon, someone with a huge influence. His theme is gloomy - the coming disaster, the end of the Temple. For this he was not popular - hence why his very name is a byword for doom-monger in English. But he is telling it how it is. It is tough being a prophet; you get mocked and denounced for your trouble...but he is the only one in Israel in a real place. You can hear the heartache in his words: being a prophet is the worst possible thing, but the only thing worse would be not to be faithful to God's word, so “Sing to the Lord!”

No prize for where this reflection is leading. In Christ, by the power of God the Holy Spirit, we are all to be prophets of the truth who is Jesus. We are all to discern and speak truth to the powers around us. Easy for a priest to say, you might reply. A job for the professionally religious. Wrong! Certainly, I have a pulpit to use day by day, but so do we all. The pulpit of the home, of the work place, of the school, of the casual encounter. The vision of the Second Vatican Council half a century ago and more is that our world needs us all to accept our baptismal grace - to be priestly, to be prophetic and to be kingly.

That Council met within a society and culture that was in many ways still broadly tolerant of the Gospel. This has changed. Our culture is now not in any way agreeable to the demands and visions of Christian faith. Rather it is openly hostile to us, to the very idea that there is truth. Now the “I invent myself” culture is accepted without question. Inevitably elements of this mind-set get imported into believers, and in my experience that always ends in unhappiness, either dramatic and unbearable, or low level anxiety and dis-ease. (That's my Jeremiah routine for today.)

More than ever we need prophets in our society: in media, in parliament, in places of work, in families. Everywhere. Even among our bishops and priests! This task, this demand makes us afraid, and the purpose of my Sunday homily is not to heap fear and anxiety upon us. Of course it makes us afraid to hear this sort of message, for we

feel pretty much unequal to the task. We are not. Start somewhere, and this week too we can ask the prayers of Our Lady of Perpetual Help to guide us and give us courage, looking at that image and of the fear in the face of the Christ-child. (Here's a [link](#) to the Novena prayers on the website.) For example, remember that St Edith Stein was converted to Christ by watching a woman kneel and pray in church. You can be a prophet in the simplest things done with integrity.

Jesus talks of fear in the sayings in the Gospel today. We hear the familiar words of Resurrection: "Do not be afraid" and then Jesus warns us to fear "him who can destroy body and soul in hell". All the commentaries tell us, rightly, that this means we are not to fear human disapproval, but to fear God, who is the only one with this power. Quite so, although Jesus never means that our relationship with God should be based on fear - that is the grotesque view our angry critics have of believers. Rather the only reaction in the face of the awesome power of God is a sense of fear, like when you sail up to the bottom of the Niagara Falls perhaps! Jesus, however, reminds us of the purposes of God to use his power for saving "even the hairs of your head."

I take a different and perhaps dodgy view of these words about who to fear. Who is the one who has the power to destroy both body and soul in hell? Answer: me. I have the power to do that to myself. (As we approach July, the July vision of Fatima 1917 made this point in a most frightening way.) I have this power, if I make the ways and assumptions of the world into my Gospel, without seeking the difficult way of the prophet. I should indeed be afraid of that. Having a critical eye for how this happens in me is part of the role of a regular Examination of Conscience.

I'm writing this having just watched a family come into church and genuflect and kneel down before the Blessed Sacrament. I found it very moving. It is the gesture of the moment, is it not? To "give the knee" as the expression now is, in protest at great injustice and brutality. But all our protesting always needs a bigger context. For ultimately it will only lead to more division and violence unless we know that it is "at the name of Jesus that every knee must bow" (*Philippians 2:10*). Here's a [link](#) to a Corpus Christi homily on these themes that I commend to you, as I do the Bishop of Leeds' homily for last Sunday. These are prophetic voices that gently take the culture around us to where it needs to go. But the culture will always resist.

Following Jesus is costly. Jeremiah the prophet bewails the price he must pay to do as God calls him. But also he knows it is the only thing to do to be happy. The story of Jeremiah is also my story and it is your story. But only if we first trust the faithfulness of God. Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope!