

OPENING COLLECT

Lord, you have taught us that all our doings without love are nothing worth: send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love, the true bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whoever lives is counted dead before you. Grant this for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 20.7-13

Jeremiah cried out:

7 O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughing-stock all day long; everyone mocks me. 8 For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, 'Violence and destruction!' For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. 9 If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. 10 For I hear many whispering: 'Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. 'Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him.'

11 But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten. 12 O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. 13 Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

SECOND READING: Romans 6.1b-11

1 Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ

This week and next, we explore Matthew's account of Jesus sending the 12 on mission. They are to 'preach the Kingdom and heal the sick'. In today's Gospel, he warns them that the path they are to take (the way they are to walk) will not be easy. It is appropriate, therefore, that we should read a link passage from the prophet Jeremiah, who had a hard time throughout his ministry. Jeremiah worked in Judah, when the Babylonians, taking over from the Assyrians, were setting out to establish and maintain their kingdom (C.6th.-5th. BC). Observing, as others before him, the false religious and social behaviour of the people of God, he prophesied judgement and the destruction of Jerusalem and the people. In chapters 18 and 19, he has observed a Potter having to throw the clay again because what he had made was spoilt. So, says, Jeremiah will God remake his people, and he smashes a pot on the walls of Jerusalem to illustrate the judgement that is coming. Small wonder that he was persecuted. That is the background to this heartfelt passage. He has become a 'laughing stock', but he knows he must speak out for God, and expresses his trust in the LORD.

Paul's letters, and Romans is an outstanding example, are basically teaching documents. He is constantly concerned with the quality of life in the young churches. Their way of life has changed, or should have done, for Christ has made a difference. Here, he reminds the young Christians, what baptism into Christ really

was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Gospel: Matthew 10.24-39

Jesus summoned the twelve and sent them out with the following instruction: ²⁴ 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! ²⁶ So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³² Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. ³⁴ Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶ and one's foes will be members of one's own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.'

means. They must die to the old life, of sin, and walk in the new life (v.4), alive to God in Christ Jesus. The root meaning of 'metanoia' (in the Greek), which we translate 'repentance', is 'turning round, changing your mind and direction in life. So Paul tells them that things have changed. They are no longer enslaved by sin (v.6), and under the dominion of death. Next week, Paul will continue to explore what this means.

As Jesus sends the twelve out on their mission to heal and preach the Kingdom, he warns them that they cannot expect an easy life. They will be no better received and treated than he was. If they call the 'master of the house', their teacher, 'Beelzebul', then they also will malign the members of the household or students. However, the disciples must not be afraid, for they have a crucial role in the work of God. What they hear 'whispered' (v.27), they are to proclaim from the housetops. Indeed, they need to trust in the love of God, in whose eyes they are valuable. But, he warns them there will be dissension; there will be opposition. In a saying, which is difficult to understand, he says he did not come to bring 'peace', but, we might say, to stir things up and cause division. The challenge to the twelve, and to each one of us, is to decide whose side we are on. We must be ready, like Jeremiah, to 'take up the cross', open to the challenge of finding our true life, whatever that cost is. As Jesus says, in Luke 9.62, no one who 'puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom'.

Post-Communion Collect

Loving Father, we thank you for feeding us at the supper of your Son: sustain us with your Spirit, that we may serve you here on earth until our joy is complete in heaven, and we share in the eternal banquet with Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.