

Homily For Saturday of the 17th Week of in Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - July 30, 2022

Jer. 26:1-16,24 "It is the Lord who sent me to prophesy against this house and this city."

Psalms 69:14-33 "Let me be delivered from my enemies. Let your salvation protect me."

Matt 14:1-12 "The king was grieved but, out of regard for his oaths, he commanded John beheaded."

Telling the Truth

Introduction

What is so beautiful about our story, the story of God's great plan of blessing, of salvation, is that everywhere we look, we see Jesus and we see ourselves. It is beautiful but also terrible at times. Salvation history shows the perfection that will be embodied at the incarnation, Jesus Christ. It also shows us the many ways of imperfection that Jesus will correct. When we look at the story of salvation correctly, we see how God has been revealed his holiness, his perfection, in a thousand ways, all pointing to the Messiah. In today's passages are fantastic illustrations of this truth in the story of Jeremiah, one of the greatest Old Testament prophets, and in John the Baptist, whom Jesus declared the greatest prophet.

Jeremiah

Look at all the players in the drama around Jeremiah and see if it reminds you of what will take place. Jeremiah preaches the truth from God. The question then, as now, is "Who wants to hear the truth?" Some do and some want him dead for doing it.

In this drama, you can hear the prefigured story of Jesus Christ. There is a hastily called trial. The religious leaders, prophets and priests employed by the king, go to those in power to ask for Jeremiah's death: "He keeps criticizing us and we don't like it." As is usual when truth is not the priority, those who come from God are accused of the very things that the accusers are guilty of.

So they make something up: "He is speaking against the whole city and the people." But Jeremiah declares that he is speaking for the Lord and that they will be killing innocent blood. In this case, the officials and princes protect Jeremiah. There is at least some willingness to see the truth. When Jesus is put on trial, there will be no one to defend him. The legend around Jeremiah, not in the bible, is that he was later stoned to death but, at this point in the story, the light of truth still holds up.

Matthew

The gospel passage is a little unusual in that it begins with Herod and ends with Jesus. Even Herod in some way provides a prophetic utterance, not by his will but by God's will. He says, "This is John the Baptist, raised from the dead." There is a sense that Herod is aware of power beyond what is visible. He gets it very wrong, of course, but there is something about him.

The story is very confusing unless we see that it is told in reverse. It's like Herod is having a kind of flashback. John has been imprisoned because he spoke the truth about the behaviour of the leaders. That's never a good recipe for staying alive. We are seeing more and more today that, even in democratic countries, people are being persecuted for telling the truth about who we are before God.

Both John and Jesus himself are part of the same continuity of revelation. Both are put to death by politicians who believe a lie and perpetuate that lie. Made aware of the impact Jesus is having on the crowds, Herod concludes that John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. Mighty powers are displayed in Jesus, reminding Herod of John. And so, the Baptist was a forerunner for Jesus in his life, but also in his death.

Call To Action

Pope Benedict explains that both Jeremiah and St. John the Baptist remind us that the Truth is Truth. There are no compromises." And so the duty of Christians is to make known the truth, even if it will be opposed. We also see in the story that Herod makes an oath that he feels he has to keep. This is a kind of prefiguring of

the sacramental way of life. He feels bound by his oath, even though it is for something that he himself recognizes as a kind of evil.

Working with engaged couples preparing to be married in the Catholic Church, I feel like the task of encouraging a sacramental view of marriage is a huge task. Even Catholic couples are so imbued with the secular and ordinary thinking of the world, that the idea of a sacred oath is foreign. There is a belief that the high calling of married life, or indeed any sacrament, is not achievable. Therefore why bother trying. Of course, our teaching reminds us over and over that our limited faithfulness is only perfected because of the perfect faithfulness of the one who makes his oath on our behalf. Even in the evil Herod, we see a pagan glimmer of one of the underpinnings of a sacrament. It is a commitment.

St. Claude says: "Never be afraid of relying too much on Him, but rather seek always to increase your trust more and more, for this is the most pleasing homage you can pay Him and it will be the measure of the graces you will receive. Little or much will be given you according as you have expected little or much."

We feel the humiliation keenly when we are insulted or persecuted. We are not made of stone. Of some martyrs we read that they suffered terribly under their torments. Other saints seem to have rejoiced in those same kinds of torments. But all were rewarded by the crown of glory. It is not the pain or the feeling that makes the martyr, but supernatural motives.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Let hearts that seek the Lord rejoice. Turn to the Lord and constantly seek his face.*

Collect: *Almighty God, make us love what you command, so that we may merit what you promise.*

Jeremiah: *After Jeremiah had spoken all that the Lord had commanded, the officials of Judah came from the King's house. Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death because he has prophesied against this city." Then Jeremiah spoke, "It is the Lord who sent me to prophesy against this house and this city. Now therefore amend your ways, obey the voice of the Lord and he will change his mind about the disaster that he has pronounced upon this city. Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God." Jeremiah was not given over into the hands of the people to be put to death.*

Psalm: *Rescue me. Let me be delivered from my enemies. Let your salvation, O God, protect me. I will praise the name of God with a song. You who seek God, let your hearts revive.*

Matthew: *Herod heard about Jesus and he said, "This is John the Baptist raised from the dead. For Herod had arrested John and put him in prison. Because John had been telling Herod's brother Philip "It is not lawful for you to have Herodias as your wife." Herod feared the crowd because they regarded John as a prophet. The daughter of Herodias danced and pleased Herod so much that he promised on oath to grant her whatever she might ask. Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." The king was grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he commanded John to be beheaded. The head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who brought it to her mother. His disciples came and took the body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.*