

Homily for the Thursday of the Third Week in Lent

The Best before Date

The passage from Jeremiah ends with a very sobering indictment on Judah.

This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.

When a nation turns away from God willfully choosing to disobey him, truth perishes and is cut off from their lips. Now think about this with me. Milk that has perished still has the appearance of milk and from a distance it seems just fine. But put it in a glass and then put that glass to your lips. What was anticipated as a cold glass of white smoothness to wash down those chocolate cookies fresh out of the oven, spoils an afternoon snack, especially if you don't have any more milk in the fridge.

When truth perishes from our lips it is not the milk that goes sour but our lives. When this happens at a national level it leads to forms of totalitarianism that Pope Benedict called the dictatorship of relativism.

Our text begins with the prophet declaring as he speaks for God:

Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you."

When truth is upheld human flourishing can prosper. Think of the man in the Gospel. He was mute, held by the grip of the devil. When Jesus can confront the demonic presence the man's lips are open and he speaks so that the crowds are amazed. But sadly, those who should have known better, Israel's religious leaders, say Jesus is in league with Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Now for you to appreciate the depth of this insult you need to know something about Beelzebul.

He was a Philistine god worshiped at Ekron (2 Kings 1:2–16). It translates something like "Prince Baal", a well-known god of the Canaanites. Jews mockingly changed its meaning to "lord of flies" or "lord of dung". Talk about truth perishing, claiming that the Lord of glory, Jesus is in league with the Lord of dung, the devil.

But such is our human propensity to choose the deception and reject the truth. Listen to how Jeremiah puts it.

Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward. 25 From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my

servants the prophets to them, day after day; 26 yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did.

May we be a people alert to the perishing of truth and may we like Jeremiah speak and live prophetically and graciously. For while we may not be able to stem the tide of totalitarianism Canadian style, we can, like Jesus, touch the lives of individuals so that their hearts can be freed, and mouths open to speak the truth in love.