

Homily for the Thursday of the Third Week in Lent

Jeremiah 7:23–28
 Psalm 95:1–2, 6–9
 Joel 2:12–13
 Luke 11:14–23

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 people turn 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.

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. Think again of our Jeremiah passage. *The Word among Us* had this thoughtful reflection that I share with you now.

We often hear the Christian life compared to a journey, and for good reason. When someone takes a journey, it's because they want to get somewhere—just as we are journeying toward our ultimate destination of heaven. And as anyone on a journey knows, the best way to get to the destination is to keep moving forward. That's what makes today's first reading so poignant.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God laments that his people have been going backward and not forward. They have turned their backs to the Lord and started walking away from him and back into the darkness of sin.

Think about this image for a bit. What is sin if it's not going backward, returning to the urges and desires that cut us off from God and one another? And what is the result of walking backward? We move away from our destination and lose sight of the heavenly life that is our inheritance in Christ.

At the same time, what is a life of faith if it's not one of constantly moving forward with our eyes fixed on the goal? What is it if it's not taking the bold step of trusting that God will support us, strengthen us, and fulfill us far more than sin could ever derail us?

When you are faced with temptation today, keep this image in your mind. Remember that the choice is always yours: whether to take a step backward, away from your goal, or to walk forward, out of the swirling drives and urges and into the arms of your heavenly Father. Commit yourself today to continuing on with your journey of trust and love, keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus and his heavenly throne.

Remember too that the journey forward is not one you take alone. You are surrounded by the saints and angels. You have the witness, prayer, and support of brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world and particularly here at St. Peter's. Best of all, Jesus himself is always with you "until the end of the age" through the life and teaching of the Church. (Matthew 28:20).

As this week winds down, take a few moments to examine your journey. Ask if there are any obstacles that you can remove. Is there anything you can do to make your way forward smoother and quicker?¹

¹ <https://wau.org/meditations/>