

Fr. Brad Neely
4th Sunday Ordinary Time
Sts Peter & Paul: Jan 31, 2010
Jer 1: 4-5, 17-19; 1Cor 12: 31-13:13; Lk 4: 21-30

I've always been intrigued with the verses from the prophet Jeremiah that we hear in today's first reading: "The word of the LORD came to me, saying: ***Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you. Be not crushed on their account, as though I would leave you crushed before them; for it is I this day who have made you a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of brass, against the whole land: against Judah's kings and princes, against its priests and people. They will fight against you but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.***"

Another layer to add onto the sanctity of life--- God knows us before we were conceived! Not only another layer onto the sanctity of life, but another layer surrounding the mystery of *who God is*. None of us are alive and on this earth haplessly. We ARE somebody in the sight of God.

The prophet who brings us this message had an interesting life. Jeremiah was born around 646BC. "[H]e lived through the tragic years preceding and succeeding the ruin of the kingdom of Judah." He also lived subsequently during the time of the Babylonian exile, when King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Palestine. "Jeremiah lived through these catastrophic events, preaching, threatening, prophesying disaster, and admonishing one Jewish king after the other" all in vain. He was persecuted and imprisoned.

This all given, his personality was quite interesting: he was said to have "an affectionate and gentle disposition..." What an age to have a gentle disposition! Jeremiah, "this man of peace," one who was devoted to facilitating the message of God, was, in doing so, "forever at war---

*with his own people,
*with kings, priests,
*with false prophets,
*and with the nation itself,

But according to a commentary within the Jerusalem Bible, "All this suffering purified his soul of everything unworthy and made it open to God." He conceived Mosaic law "as an *inward* force"--- he respected "the function of love in true religion"--- and was concerned "for the person as an individual. . ." So, it sounds as though he didn't live an easy life. But should we consider *easy* as an exclusive benchmark? Again, his suffering "purified his soul. . . and made it open to God." **....And our souls are important.**

We all have something in common with Jeremiah. **Our souls are important.** Through all the strife Jeremiah lives amongst, he remained faithful to God, delivering God's message, and not always to receptive ears. To persevere at all, Jeremiah would had to have had a very deep spirit, conviction, and close connection with God. He would had to have had -- **Godly love.**

Along comes St. Paul, writing the words we heard today some 700 years after Jeremiah: "If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing" "Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, It is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing

*but rejoices with the truth.
It bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never fails.”*

The love Paul talks about here
is “dear love,--affection.”

This is love is different from the love
that refers specifically to the respect and dignity
that we are to give to one another.

We don't know what exact nuances of love
would have been working inside Jeremiah,
but we do know that he rose above the grief
that other human beings were placing upon him--
for God's sake.

When we consider our own lives,
where is it that we want to be?
What convictions do we have about love?---

how we love others

how we love God

how God loves us?

We are created by a God

who knows us before we are born,
thus, we are steeped in divine love
whether we recognize it at each moment or not.
No matter what the world throws at us,
what would be a better way to spend our lives
than to wear Christ in the world---
wear the love that God has lavished on us---
emulate God as best we are able
through thick or thin.

Like Jeremiah,
any suffering we encounter will purify our souls.

And like St. Paul,
the love we receive from God
and allow to pass through us to others,
will bring us into real-time experience
with his words that claim:

[love] “*rejoices with the truth.*

*It bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.*

Love never fails.”

Without it, we are a resounding gong.