

## Homily for 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - August 30, 2020



Peter, in last weekend's gospel account, made his profession of faith, ***"You are the Christ, Son of the living God,"*** in a place surrounded by pagan images and Roman power. This was a difficult place, to say the least, to profess your faith in the one, true God. Jeremiah, in today's first reading, also struggles and succeeds, like Peter, in speaking God's truth as a prophet. He felt he was too young and inadequate for the job God was asking of him. God reminded him that He called Jeremiah to be his prophet while Jeremiah was still in the womb. Talk about being young and inadequate! In God's mind, it is never a question of worthiness but willingness. Not one person in the history of the world was called by God because of their worthiness. Not one.

Keeping with Jeremiah, he was forbidden to marry in order to focus all his energy on preaching God's message of love and conversion. Unfortunately, after 40 years of doing this, people still were not listening. So, Jeremiah had to tell the people that God would allow the holy city of Jerusalem to be destroyed by the Babylonians if they did not turn their hearts back to God. He hated being a prophet of doom with such a gloomy message, and he wept over the fact that people were not listening to him nor to God. Jeremiah says to God in today's first reading, ***"I have become a laughing stock all day long; everyone mocks me."*** So, he comes up with another plan of excusing himself from being God's prophet by saying, ***"I will not mention you or speak of your name anymore."*** It is like he is swearing off cigarettes, but deep down he does not have the will power to get through the afternoon without a drag. Have you ever sworn off love because you got burned in a relationship and secretly said, "That's it! I'm done with this game of love" only to have it entice you once again? Deep down Jeremiah knows this not-speaking-about-God strategy will not work because, ***"there is like a fire in my bones that You, God, put there and that I cannot hold back. I cannot hold your word inside me; I have to speak it no matter what the results."*** Maybe that is

what truth is like, and maybe that was what was going on in Peter when he professed, ***“You are the Christ, son of the living God.”*** Like Jeremiah 600 years prior, Peter, too, could not not speak the truth. There is a truth within all of us that needs to be spoken. Even if no one is interested in listening to our truth, the need to speak that truth does not go away, in fact, it grows stronger as we get older.

There seems to be more unrest and more protest in the world with each passing week. There is hardly a newscast without at least one story of protest. I try to read these protests through the eyes of Jeremiah. Getting back to Jeremiah again, he was a prophet whose entire ministry revolved around tearing down and building up, of plucking up and of replanting, of destroying and of creating anew. This is the process of **“transformation”** and not simply of **“change.”** We are a society with plenty of change but little transformation. In the world of change you just keep adding to what you have, improving it or making more of it. However, faith is about transformation not change.

In the world of transformation something in us has to be torn down, plucked up, and destroyed before something new has room to emerge. No wonder people ignored and opposed Jeremiah for 40 years; we would, too. None of the people in Jeremiah’s time and none of us likes having anything torn down, plucked up, or destroyed in our lives. None of us, including myself, likes transformation; we would much prefer change, a little tweaking here and there. St. Paul says in our second reading, ***“Do not be conformed to this world.”*** Why? Because this world is about constant change, and this world, as good as it is, is inadequate, incapable, and not up to the task of helping you to die to anything so that true transformation can happen in you. Listen to Paul’s words again, ***“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God.”***

When I watch the news and try to figure out what is going with world events, I am not always convinced by all the calls for change. Many movements sincerely start off with peaceful protests for change, but within a short time peace turns to violence, looting and chaos. St. Paul challenges me to ***“be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”*** Why? ***“So that you may discern what is the will of God.”*** Underneath all the protests for change, I am challenged to discern the transformation God is calling me to, so that transformation can happen in others.

Transformation, one way or another, always involves the Cross...always involves death...there's no way around it. There is no transformation, no renewal, in all of nature without something first dying. Jesus knew that was the great pattern of nature and maybe that is why he spent so much time in nature and so little time in synagogue or Temple. Nature always gives you the big pattern, and nature never lies. There is little evidence that Jesus' disciples would have understood his words when he said, "**take up your cross and follow me.**" They would have only likely understood these words after Jesus put those words into action and actually died on the Cross and set in motion his own transformation into resurrected life.

I have benefitted from therapy and have encouraged many other to seek the benefits therapy can offer in their lives. Therapy, for all its goodness, helps you to get around the Cross or to cope with the crosses life throws at you. But faith alone helps you not with coping but with going through the Cross with the promise that resurrection is already embracing you. Crosses and transformation are hard work and call for a lot of honest soul-searching and discernment. But think of it this way: any object that casts a dark shadow is only able to do so because of a bright light behind it. In other words, there is no darkness without light just as there is no Cross without a resurrection. If Jesus was not convinced of God's resurrecting love, he never would have embraced his own Cross nor would he have been able to ask us to follow him and do the same. "So, **get behind me,** get in my following," Jesus is saying, "so that with me leading and you following I guarantee you resurrection and not crosses will ultimately define your life and will be your destiny." This was the great pattern Jeremiah knew, Jesus knew, St. Paul knew, and now we know.

Fr. Phil