

12th Sunday of the Year A

First Reading Jeremiah 20:10-13

I hear so many disparaging me, "Terror from every side!" Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All those who used to be my friends watched for my downfall, "Perhaps he will be seduced into error. Then we will master him and take our revenge!" But the Lord is at my side, a mighty hero; my opponents will stumble, mastered, confounded by their failure; everlasting, unforgettable disgrace will be theirs. But you, Lord of Hosts, you who prove with justice, who scrutinise the loins and heart, let me see the vengeance you will take on them, for I have committed my cause to you. Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has delivered the soul of the needy from the hands of evil men.

Second Reading Romans 5:12-15

Sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned. Sin existed in the world long before the Law was given. There was no law and so no one could be accused of the sin of "law-breaking", yet death reigned over all from Adam to Moses, even though their sin, unlike that of Adam, was not a matter of breaking a law. Adam prefigured the One to come, but the gift itself considerably outweighed the fall. If it is certain that through one man's fall so many died, it is even more certain that divine grace, coming through the one man, Jesus Christ, came to so many as an abundant free gift.

Gospel Matthew 10:26-33

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: "Do not be afraid. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows. So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of men, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven."

Meditation

Christ does not promise his disciples an enticing style of life. He does assure them that persecution will be their lot. If the gospel is truly a force contesting evil in all its forms, then the Church cannot avoid the narrow gate of the paschal mystery, the cross which leads to glory. Identification with political power and financial power is an illusion. Even in the midst of persecution, the disciples have security in Christ, "Do not fear!" The apostolate is God's work and carries within itself the assurance of success. Only sin is to be feared. The persecutors can truly kill the body, but our authentic life belongs to God who, like a father, watches over the smallest of his creatures.

Martyrdom was once looked upon as a liturgical act: the martyr mounted the funeral-pyre as if an altar. The interrogation and agony were the occasion to proclaim one's faith in Christ before offering the sacrifice. The propagation of the gospel was well served by the martyr. Contemporary martyrdom takes place in the underground of a cave or a camp from which no one returns. The technology of human torture violates both body and soul, permitting the propagandists of oppressive regimes to profit from "spontaneous confessions". The voices of these martyrs, inspired by a greater heroism, continue to be lifted up to heaven. On the last day, Christ himself will offer their witness to his Father.