

22ND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

LITURGY AND LIFE

The First Reading of today is an expression of Jeremiah's anguish because of his prophetic ministry. Like the Psalmist Jeremiah makes a protest to the Lord (cf. Ps 13). The protest is in strong terms. In spite of God's assurance of protection, Jeremiah still feels that he has been unfairly exposed to danger, perhaps even that he has been misled, and that his great sacrifices in the cause of his prophetic ministry have been in vain. He also feels that he has been led along, powerless to do otherwise than proclaim doom, so that he has been isolated from others.

Such a sense of isolation can be a common experience in Christian life. It is, however, in its own way a deception, because the more fundamental truth is that God intends good for his faithful servants (Rom 8:28-30). Jeremiah has an understanding of this, seeing again the truth that God will be just and therefore will act with integrity towards him, but he has no hesitation in sharing his feelings with God. The accusation against God may have been one way of getting God's attention and calling to action the God who, according to the traditional understanding, protects the innocent and punishes the guilty.

The Second Reading contains Paul's exhortation to the Romans. In this exhortation Paul demands that Christians in Rome realize that they are living in the new era of salvation and are to strive to overcome evil with good.

Coming to the Gospel of today, we have the first passion prediction. The passion prediction lays emphasis on the necessity of Jesus' death followed by resurrection. Not understanding the concept of Messianic suffering, Peter begins to chide Jesus. He can see the victory ahead but cannot comprehend the requisite suffering and death that would lead to it. But Jesus' response is decisive. "Get behind me, Satan!" was a sharp reminder that by not considering what was God's plans Peter was playing the role of a tempter. The testing that Jesus had met and overcome in his initial encounter with Satan in the desert was not once for all; it reappears in the sincere and

prayerful remonstrations of the disciples. To accomplish his ministry in the way human criteria judge to be successful is, in fact, a demonic temptation. Jesus' mission is to inaugurate an alternative kingdom, a radically different way of exercising authority. Here his opponent is none other than the rock on which he will be building the new community. Peter the rock becomes Peter the stone of stumbling. Peter's objection can be understood as either a wrong idea of Messiahship or personal love for Jesus, or both. Peter turns out to be an obstacle for Jesus to accomplish his mission, a kind of stumbling block which Jesus strongly rejects.

To be a follower of Jesus means to surrender oneself totally to God and ready to follow Jesus in every aspect of the Servant role, even to carrying a cross. There can be no renewal without a dying to the old ways of thinking. True discipleship is lived in the light of the coming judgement where those who have lost lives for Jesus' sake will find them amid the blessings that accompany the abundance of life with the Father in the kingdom of God. The call to discipleship is based on faith in Christ and confidence in the future victory of God.

- Dr Augustine Kanachikuzhy, ssp