

Homily
September 3, 2023
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
22:05 – 32:47

Did you ever begin a task and part-way in realize, it's a lot more than you thought it was going to be? Have you ever taken a new job and after a few months realized, "This isn't what I thought I was getting into!" Anybody? Oh, yeah.

You duped me, O Lord and I let you dupe me. Or in another translation, *You seduced me, O Lord, and I let you seduce me.* Thus, the Prophet Jeremiah laments this morning, in Chapter 20 – halfway through what we know as the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.

He's tired. He's done what the Lord had asked from the very beginning, in Chapter 1, where the Lord tells him, "You will be a wall of brass." In other words, very strong for me in speaking my word. And even though God alludes to the fact that he will be opposed – well, it kind of goes over Jeremiah's head how bad it's going to be.

He's reviled. He's accused. He's thrown into prison. He's thrown into a muddy well, a cistern that's really not working very well. And he's finally had it up to here, (gesturing above his head), literally and figuratively. And he tells the Lord, *I'm done. Don't ask for any more. I've done what you said. Look what I got. I'm shutting up! I'm going to speak no more.*

But then, that seed of purpose, which the Lord had planted, that seed which was sweet, the very word that was given to him to speak by the Lord, begins to heat up within. And he says, *I can't hold it in anymore.* And for 28 more chapters he goes on.

Things don't change. He's still put upon. He's still asked to proclaim a difficult message to the people, that if they don't stop trying to live by foreign alliances, live outside of the Covenant (in terms of how they treat people), then something awful is going to happen. Like, the Northern Kingdom – they're going to be carried away. And all that was beautiful that they held onto will be lost. And at the end of the book, he's himself carried off to Egypt, where he definitely did not want to go.

You duped me, O Lord. And I let you.

In the Gospel there's sort of a different thing going on. Remember last week - Peter? "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Not only are you the Messiah. But you are as well, the Son of God. It's a proclamation of mission and divine wonder.

But today, when Peter sees that the mission that he thought he'd attached himself to – a triumphant Messiah, a king to restore everything, was not going to happen in his way – he tells Jesus, "No, you can't." *That's not the mission I signed up for. You can't do this.*

Then Jesus says to him, "Get behind me, you Satan. You are a stumbling block." That is a *scandalon*, in Greek. You know the word "scandal." Basically, it means a block you trip over. And Jesus says, No, I am going to fulfill this mission. And guess what, Peter. If you really want to follow me, you will accept it.

And know that you too, and all disciples from this point until this moment in history (pointing at "now") will be asked to do the same. Take up that cross. That's part of the mission.

Now we know that Peter has a change of heart, only after he's denied Jesus, and Jesus says, "I still love you." And Peter then goes on to live out the mission which Jesus entrusted to him and showed him the way.

But I wonder if even later, Peter kind of went (In exasperation), "Oh! This is hard! This isn't easy. This isn't glorious. But this is the way the Lord would have me go."

Have you had wonderful high times in your life? Mr. Black? I mean, look. You have three wonderful children and a lovely wife. You must have had some really good high times in your life. (Response, "Yes, sir.") He likes to say, "Yes, sir." I feel like I'm in the military.

And you? How many here are married? Raise your hand. How many here are students? Raise your hand. How many here are widows or widowers? How many of you are engineers? Firefighters, here? School principals? School presidents? Retired folks? (Oh, boy! I can dream...)

Oh well, anyway – every one of you, in whatever mission you have taken up in your life, you already know that to which God called you – either in Sacrament or in profession and how it is used to serve the people of God, to serve humanity. That there are moments when you go, "I didn't think this was going to happen." "I didn't sign up for this!" "What?"

I can tell you, forty years ago when I made my promises and was ordained, there was a whole lot of things that I didn't know. Can you imagine? Roofs! Plumbing! Capital campaigns. Spreadsheets. Balance sheets. Oh! (Holding his head) Traffic signs. Regulations about where you can put a sign on your property.

None of that was in the seminary. None of that was in the promises I made to the people of God and to the Archbishop of Indianapolis and the Archdiocese. (gesturing, What?!)

And there are moments when I have joined Jeremiah. What? You duped me. You showed me all these wonderful things of being a priest and then...This?!

Yeah.

So, brothers and sisters, we have a choice to make. It's not wrong! It is not wrong that Jeremiah was fed up. He was tired. This was a "lament." And he spoke it to God directly. But we know what happens. He went on.

For you and me, there are times when we are Jeremiah. There are times when we're Peter. We want to deny death. We want to deny all sorts of things that we are called to live. And then Resurrection hope hits us. And we go on.

So when you feel like Jeremiah, go back to Chapter 20. Sit with him and he will sit with you. When you have a sense that the Lord made a mistake – either in calling you, or in putting you into what you're doing – be like Peter. Wait. Live it through. And then together, the mission and ministry of who we are will come to completion.