

Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

April 3, 2020

First Reading: Jeremiah 20: 10-13

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 18:2-3A, 3BC-4, 5-6, 7

Gospel: John 10: 31-42

To my family and friends in New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Florida, and to those in the United Kingdom and in Canada, today is still April the second. But to my family and friends in the Philippines, today is already April the third there. This Mass is the First Friday Mass for you.

For us to appreciate more profoundly the first reading, which we took from the prophet Jeremiah, let us move back a few verses before our first reading. Please know that Jeremiah was a hesitant prophet, and a complaining prophet. He always wanted to be sure of the protection from Yahweh, the Lord. Despite the fact that he was the servant of God, still Jeremiah was always in need of assurance that God would protect him. If that protection fell short of his expectation, He complained against Yahweh, the Lord. There were times that he thought that God deceived him.

But God was not in any way displeased with Jeremiah. God understood the weakness of Jeremiah. Yahweh knew what kind of stuff Jeremiah was made of. I guess, there is a Jeremiah in each one of us. WE want to spread God's word, we want to become spokespersons of God, yet we have not completely surrendered ourselves to God. But, that is not the theme of the first reading. The theme of today's first reading is the twist in Jeremiah's story. He still

trusted in the Word of Yahweh; he still denounced the evils of his generation. He went on performing his prophetic mission. And that is where our first starts.

His enemies left him. They were embarrassed by his behavior. They felt that he was not relevant anymore; that he was already becoming a nuisance and a liability. Does it sound familiar? When we start practicing our faith, we meet opposition? Why because others would feel the comparison. Back in the 90's, I knew of a government employee who used to bring home paper clips and carbon paper. Mind you, a carbon paper, was simply that: a carbon paper. But if everybody in the office brings home a piece, the supply would soon be depleted. What if most employees brought home paper clips and rubber bands, what will happen to the stock at the office? Now, this employee after taking PREX or Parish Renewal Experience stopped doing it. He got so much flak from his co-employees. But he maintained his firm resolve not to do it just because others were doing it.

Now, back to the reading: Despite denunciation by his friends, despite snares and tricks laid by his friends, Jeremiah did not back out from his mission. Let me pause for a while and ask: If friends act this way, WHO NEEDS ENEMIES?

Towards the end of the reading, JEREMIAH declared that he would entrust his cause to Yahweh. Jeremiah knew that God would His enemies to shame, that Yahweh who probes the heart, would exact vengeance upon His enemies because YAHWEH IS WITH HIM, and THAT YAHWEH IS AN AWESOME MIGHTY GOD.

Let me guide your thoughts into what we are going through right now: this scourge of the Coronavirus. All of us are scared of this Coronavirus. But if we entrust our cares, our concerns to Yahweh, the Lord, He will listen to our fears and anxieties.

We know that while it is true that God is a mighty God, we also know that a sincere and humble prayer makes God buckle down and grant our supplications. The weakness of God is a sincere and humble prayer of His children.

GOSPEL

Jesus proves from Scripture that He is the Christ but the Jewish leaders stubbornly refuse to believe.

In order to appreciate more deeply the gospel of today, which is from the Gospel of John, chapter 10, verses 31 to 42, let us go back to the earlier verses: namely verses 24 to 30.

But before we go into that, let us recall that Jesus gave sight to the blind man during the Sabbath as we heard in chapter 9. The entire chapter 9 talked about it.

Now, we are in chapter 10. The Jews still do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah. They wanted Him to say clearly if He was indeed the Messiah or not in verse 24.

Please take note that in verses 25 to 30, instead of answering YES or No, He said: *“I’ve already told you and you don’t believe. The reason is because you aren’t my sheep. My sheep hear me and follow and I give them eternal life and no one can ever take them away.”* He says, *“My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”*

Again, please take note of verse 30. **“MY FATHER AND I ARE ONE”**.

Our gospel starts on verse 31: They picked up stones to throw at Him. Brothers and sisters. I want you to realize that the Jews were fine with Jesus performing miracles (as long as it was not done on Sabbath). I

want you to realize that it was okay for the Jews if Jesus claimed that His power came from God. But since Jesus said that **He and the Father are one**, they could not tolerate that. Why? because He was saying He was the same as God (verse 33). They just could not accept that, so they wanted to kill Him.

But let us listen to the response of Jesus in verses 34 to 36: *“Jesus answered them: Is it not written in your law, I said, “you are gods?”. If it calls them gods, to whom the word of God came, and Scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, blasphemes because I said, “I am the Son of God?”*

Please be prepared for this. I want you to be on the same page with me. The Jews were invoking scriptures in order to attack Jesus. Now here is Jesus invoking scriptures in order to defend Himself. Let us search the source of Jesus in the scriptures. From where does Jesus quote this verse? How does it justify calling Himself the Son of God? This is from verse 6 of Psalm 82. We read it the entire Psalm, there are only 8 verses anyway:

God stands in the congregation of the mighty; he judges among the gods. How long will you judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked. They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course. I have said, You are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. Arise, O God, judge the earth: for you shall inherit all nations (Ps. 82:1-8).

At this point in our gospel, Jesus is reminding the Jews the essence of Psalm 82: God addressed men as “gods”. These men (who were called gods) were supposed to defend the poor and fatherless, do justice to the afflicted and needy, deliver them, and get rid of the wicked. In other words, these are the protectors and defenders of Israel; but they’re not doing their job. The people have hope, though, because these wicked men are going to die and give way to God who is the true Judge of all the earth: *“Arise, O God, judge the earth: for you shall inherit the nations”*(verse 8).

Please bear in mind that there is an earlier Psalm which we can connect with Psalm 82. It is Psalm 2. We will read verses 5 to 8:

“Then he warns them in anger and terrifies them with his fury. On Zion, my sacred hill, he says, “I have installed my king”. “I will announce”, says the king, “what the Lord has declared. He said to me: “You are my Son: today I have become your father. Ask, and I will give you all the nations; the whole earth will be yours.”(Psalm 2:5-8).

These verses were both prophecies of the Messiah. These men who were called “gods” (but merely men) were sent by God to do justice. But they did not fulfill the mission given by God, because they were sinful. Hence God installed His Son. His Son will be faithful. When He arises He will rule all the nations of the world.

Let us go back to our gospel. Here in this story, Jesus is saying that He is the Son of God. His argument is: How can He be charged with blasphemy when Scripture - which cannot be set aside broken - calls the men God has sent “gods” and “children of God”? If He (Jesus) has been sent, then He has every right to take these names for Himself and there’s one way to find out if He’s telling the truth. And what is that way? Brothers and sisters, let us go to verses 37 - 38: “Do not believe me if I am not doing the works of my Father. But if I do them,

even though you do not believe me, you should at least believe in the works that I do, that you may know, once and for all, that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.

Since we believe that Jesus is in the Father and that the Father is in Jesus, then, we should hold on to His words in the midst of this Coronavirus scare.