

Weekend Readings & Reflections

January 29-30, 2022 – Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection: *God's words in today's First Reading point us beyond Jeremiah to Jesus. Like Jeremiah, Jesus was consecrated in the womb and sent as a "prophet to the nations" (see [Luke 1:31-33](#)). Like the prophets before Him, Jesus too faces hostility. In today's Gospel, the crowd in His hometown synagogue quickly turns on Him, apparently demanding a sign, some proof of divine origins—that He's more than just "the son of Joseph." The sign He gives them is that of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. From their colorful careers Jesus draws two stories. In each, the prophets bypass "many . . . in Israel" to bestow God's blessings on non-Israelites who had faith that the prophets were men of God (see [1 Kings 17:1-16](#); [2 Kings 5:1-14](#)). "None . . . not one" in Israel was found deserving, Jesus emphasizes. His point isn't lost on His audience. They know He's likening them to the "many . . . in Israel" in the days of the prophets. That's why they try to shove Him off the cliff. As He promised to protect Jeremiah, the Lord delivers Jesus from those who would crush Him. And as were Elijah and Elisha, Jesus is sent to proclaim God's gift of salvation—not exclusively to one nation or people, but to all who realize in faith that from the womb God alone is their hope, their rescuer, their "rock of refuge," as we sing in today's Psalm. Prophecies, Paul tells us in today's Epistle, are partial and pass away "when the perfect comes." In Jesus, the word of the prophets has been brought to perfection, fulfilled in those who have ears to hear, as He declares in today's Gospel. Greater than the gifts of faith and hope, Jesus shows us how to love as He loved—to love God as our Father, as the one who formed us in the womb and destined us to hear His saving Word. This is the salvation, the "mighty works of the Lord," that we, like the psalmist, are thankful to proclaim daily in the Eucharist.*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome our discussion on the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, let us begin this time in prayer:

All: Lord, you call us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. We know we live in a dark world, where many people are opposed to the Gospel message and opposed to you. We pray today, that as we reflect on your Scriptures, we may be able to love our broken world as you do. You call us to be the "light of the world." Lord, help us to shine your light in the darkest places. Help us to love as you love, and in doing so, win the world back to you. We pray for the help and prayers of all the angels and saints as we pray these things through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: Today's readings are all about the love and mercy that Jesus came to bring to the world. But who is in most need of that love and mercy? Often the people Jesus loves are hard for us to love. What Jesus wants to give is not mere sentimentality, but action. It's the kind of love that will ultimately take him to the cross! When Jesus visits his hometown of Nazareth, he tells them that God wants them to love their enemies - and he wants us to do the same! Often when we see people doing the wrong thing, we want God to punish them. But Jesus tells us that God wants us to extend love and mercy. Let's investigate this more by watching this video on the readings for the week.

(Play the video on [FORMED.org](https://www.formed.org) - [Opening the Word – Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time \(Year C\)](#))

Digging Deeper

The Outsiders of Jesus' Day

In Jesus' day, those considered "outsiders" were largely the people that Jews call "Gentiles." In other words, these were the non-Jews—those who didn't know or follow the Old Testament law or those who weren't part of the ethnic family of Israel. Unfortunately, many in Jesus' day were content to keep these outsiders on the outside rather than welcome them into God's family. The Samaritan woman, whom Jesus will talk to later in his ministry, was considered an outsider, as well, because she and the other Samaritans didn't follow the same laws as the Jews.

FIRST READING ~ Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19 ~

The word of the LORD came to me, saying: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you. But do you gird your loins; stand up and tell them all that I command you. Be not crushed on their account, as though I would leave you crushed before them; for it is I this day who have made you a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of brass, against the whole land: against Judah's kings and princes, against its priests and people. They will fight against you but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.

Jeremiah lived when Israel was constantly threatened by stronger nations and the people often turned to idolatry. He tried to make Israel faithful to God despite the dangers and uncertainty that his people faced. Sometimes Jeremiah urged a course of action that made him seem like a traitor, though he was actually trying to make his people submit to God's will. As a result, his people often seemed like an army attacking (crushing) him, but God promised to make Jeremiah strong enough to withstand their onslaught. A prophet from the womb, clearly God has taken the initiative to speak to his people; Jeremiah wasn't chosen by Israel's king nor did he himself decide to become a prophet. Just as good parents love their children from infancy, so too does God love Jeremiah. In fact, God's love is greater, for God has known of Jeremiah since before Jeremiah was conceived. God's love is further shown in his promise to protect Jeremiah when the people oppose him.

- *What is the challenge of being a prophet like Jeremiah today? Do you feel formed and called by God to stand up for (or against) something in society? What has been your response so far? What happened?*
- *Have you ever sensed that God was calling you to do something difficult? How did you respond?*

SECOND READING ~ 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13 ~

Brothers and sisters: Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, It is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

St Paul continues discussing the elitist problem in the Corinthian community. Some people were setting themselves apart as a spiritual elite with boastful talk of their charisms and gifts. Gifts and charisms mean nothing if love is absent.

- *Evaluate your life by the qualities of love in the second reading: Are you patient? Kind? Jealous? Proud? Resentful? Do you take offence easily? Gossip? Delight in truth? Forgiving, trusting, and hopeful? What aspect of your character could you invite the Holy Spirit to help you with?*

St Paul uses a special word (agape) for love. It is not a sexual love (eros) or a family love (philia). Agape is a quality of love that is given regardless of a response. Agape love is loving like God loves.

- *In what ways and in what relationships do you show 'agape' love? Do you recognize people in need constitute God's agape call to us?*

GOSPEL ~ Luke 4:21-30 ~

Jesus began speaking in the synagogue, saying: "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" He said to them, "Surely you will quote me this proverb, 'Physician, cure yourself,' and say, 'Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.'" And he said, "Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went away.

Jesus continues to speak to his hometown. In an honor and shame culture of the ancient Middle East, an expectation is placed over Jesus to bring honor, glory, and acclaim to Nazareth. Be our 'local' prophet, and set up a healing station here in Nazareth like you have been doing at Capernaum. Bring in the tourists! Their attitude and concern is reputation rather than conversion. Jesus confronts them.

- *In what ways does reputation take priority over conversion in your life? When was the last time you experienced the cost of discipleship like Jeremiah and Jesus?*

Jesus identifies himself with the mission of the great prophets of Elijah and Elisha who were sent out to nearby gentile lands (Sidon) and people (Naaman the Syrian) which infuriates them. They react violently to the idea that God's favor is also for the gentiles and not exclusively to Israel.

- *Why do you think removing barriers and cultural walls meets resistance? What is beneath the categories of right / wrong, clean / unclean?*

The community at Nazareth limit Jesus by confining him to be 'Joseph's son'.

- *Have you experienced the support of family, friends and community and then as time goes on, recognize the limitations people's perception puts on you? Do you feel called to break out of reputation and move toward doing the will of God? What obstacles do you face? How will you respond to people springing to their feet and trying to throw you off the cliff?*

MEDITATION

Throughout the Gospel accounts Jesus praised individuals who put their faith in God as they remembered the great and wonderful deeds he had performed time and again. Jesus even praised outsiders - non-Jews and pagans from other lands who had heard about the mighty deeds of the God of Israel. One example Jesus mentioned was Naaman the pagan army commander from Syria who was afflicted with leprosy - a debilitating skin

disease that slowly ate away the flesh (2 Kings 5:1-15). Naaman's slave-girl was a young Jewish woman who had faith in God and compassion for Naaman her master. She urged him to seek healing from Elisha, the great prophet of Israel. When Naaman went to the land of Israel to seek a cure for his leprosy, the prophet Elisha instructed him to bathe seven times in the Jordan river. Naaman was indignant at first, but then repented and followed the prophet's instructions. In doing so he was immediately restored in body and spirit.

When Jesus first proclaimed the good news of God's kingdom to his own townspeople at Nazareth (Luke 4:23-27), he did not hesitate to confront them with their sin of indifference and unbelief. He startled his listeners in the synagogue at Nazareth with a seeming rebuke that no prophet or servant of God could receive honor among his own people. He then angered them when he complimented Gentiles (non-Jews) who had shown more faith in God than the "chosen ones" of Israel. Some who despised the Gentiles (non-Jews) even spoke of them as "fuel for the fires of hell." Jesus' praise for "outsiders" offended the ears of his own people because they were blind-sighted to God's merciful plan of redemption for all the nations. The word of rebuke spoken by Jesus was met with indignation and hostility. The Nazarenes forcibly threw him out of their town and would have done him physical harm had he not stopped them. We all stand in need of God's grace and merciful help every day and every moment of our lives. Scripture tells us that "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23). God gives grace to the humble who seek him with expectant faith and with a repentant heart that wants to be made whole and clean again.

The Lord Jesus will set us free from every sinful habit and every harmful way of relating to our neighbor, if we allow him to cleanse and heal us. If we want to walk in freedom and grow in love and holiness, then we must humbly renounce our sinful ways and submit to Christ's instruction and healing discipline in our lives. Scripture tells us that the Lord disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness (Hebrews 12:10).

- *Do you believe that God wants to act with power in your life today? Power to set you free from sin and hurtful desires, fear and oppression?*
- *Do you want the Lord Jesus to set you free and make you whole again? Ask him to show you the way to walk in his healing love and truth.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray for guidance to help in spreading the Gospel to those around us:

ALL: Lord Jesus, teach me to love Your ways that I may be quick to renounce sin and willfulness in my life. Make me whole and clean again that I may delight to do Your will. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

[Discussion questions created by Fr Frank Bird sm, Marist Priest, and distributed by www.maristlitynz.org, were shared with permission from www.livingtheword.org.nz.]

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