

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Jeremiah 20:7-9](#)

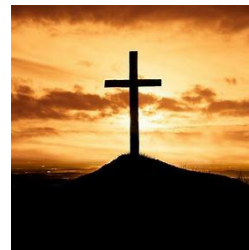
[Responsorial Psalm: 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130](#)

[Reading II: Romans 12:1-2](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 16:21-27](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/090323.cfm>



Jeremiah is an outstanding example of a prophet. He lived in the final years of the Kingdom of Judah before the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians around 589 – 587 BC. Jeremiah's call is reported in chapter one, where he protests that he is too young to speak in God's name. He reluctantly becomes a prophet, and after experiencing suffering, he complains to God in the passage that is read today.

Jeremiah complains that being a prophet is not a great experience and that God had enticed him into becoming a prophet. He has experienced ridicule and rejection as he announced God's Word. His message was harsh, proclaiming that Judah had been unfaithful to God, corruption was everywhere, and judgment was coming. He was opposed by "prophets" from the royal court, "official prophets," who were teaching that since God's temple was in Jerusalem, God would never let it be conquered. Before our passage, God instructs Jeremiah to go to the potter's house and watch. When the clay the potter is working with does not form properly, the potter pushes it down and begins again. Jeremiah is told that God can and will do the same. He is scourged for delivering this message and then complains to the Lord in the passage read today.

As Jeremiah decides that he will not speak in God's name anymore, for it only brings him trouble, he becomes aware that God's word is within him and that it is like a fire. It has power and energy that must be expressed. He cannot stop being God's prophet. He has been called, and to be true to himself, he must continue onwards. God's power is not like human power. It is so all-encompassing that one cannot ignore it.

The Gospel reading continues from the previous week, where Peter had professed his belief that Jesus was the Messiah. In this passage, Peter argues with Jesus that Jesus, as the Messiah, should not need to suffer and die. This concept of the Messiah's suffering is incomprehensible to Peter. Peter's understanding of the Messiah is that he would be a conquering hero. The common perception was that the Messiah would be like King David, defeat all enemies, and establish a political kingdom that no other power could challenge. The Messiah will restore the great kingdom of Judah that existed in the time of King David. Peter was happy to have a role in this coming kingdom, but Jesus states that Peter is thinking like humans do and not as God does.

Jesus recognizes that fulfilling his mission will require suffering. Love involves pain and a pouring out of oneself. Jesus presents a different form of the work of the Messiah. It is about offering freedom and wholeness in God's reign that will come with words and transformation of hearts. It will be a nonviolent transformation of society through self-sacrificing love. Jesus challenges Peter to follow him, to embrace the cross, and to lose his life for the sake of the mission to which God has called them. Jesus will be victorious. The victory will not be over the Romans but over sin and death.

Each disciple must also embrace the cross in her or his life. To be a disciple of Jesus, one must seek to do the Father's will, no matter the cost. In self-sacrifice, giving one's life for others, the disciple brings forth God's life as a gift to others.

Paul urges the Christians of Rome to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice. This is not a bloody ritual sacrifice. He challenges us to live our lives sacrificially. Sacrifice always involves surrender. It may involve giving something up, losing time, or sharing in someone's loss or grief. Sacrifice consists of letting go for something greater. In being sacrificial, one may be ridiculed or humiliated. Working for a cause that one believes in and facing a rejection of the cause by those who have power or money can cause one to doubt if it is worth it.

Paul says we can be transformed by the renewal of our minds in the process and then able to discern God's will. Suffering, defeat, humiliation, and rejection can open us to a new way of thinking and perceiving. One can gain a new perspective on life and one's talents. The Paschal Mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection shows how God can make all things new.

Themes:

Embracing the Cross

Paschal Mystery

Self-denial

Power found in God's Word

Discernment of God's call planted deep within each person

Reflection Questions:

Jeremiah recognizes that he must be faithful to his deepest self. What desires, interests, or gifts have been planted by God deep within you?

Jeremiah endured great suffering in speaking God's word. What forces oppose those who strive to speak God's word today?

What has the cross come to mean to you as a disciple? What or who is a cross in your life today?

How does uniting our suffering with the passion and death of Jesus bring new meaning and value to it?

Where have you seen or experienced someone choosing to suffer for the good of another?

Where have you experienced or witnessed someone living sacrificially? Did you see life or transformation occur by this sacrificial act?

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that the fire of the Holy Spirit will animate us to give witness to God and to follow the example of Jesus courageously

For the grace to follow Christ: that we may embrace the cross as we experience opposition, hardship, or rejection and allow God to raise us to new life

For all who are suffering for the sake of the Gospel: that God will protect and sustain those who risk their lives to bring the Gospel message, the sacraments, or assistance to those in difficult or distant places

For the gift of discernment: that the Spirit will guide us in our judgments and actions so that the Gospel can be manifest in our lifestyles, families, and professions

For the grace of sacrificial love: that God will help us lay down our lives in caring for our families and those whom God leads into our lives so that they may experience God's love today