

**22th Sunday of the Year (Cycle A)**  
(Jer 20:7-9; Rom 12:1-25; Matt 16:21-27)

It is interesting to note how different prophets react to their call to prophecy. Isaiah, alone among the prophets, volunteers. He hears the voice of the Lord consulting with his heavenly council: “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” Isaiah responds, “Here I am; send me!”

Jeremiah, on the other hand, when the Lord tells him he was designated as a prophet while still in his mother’s womb, before he was born, replies, “Ah, Lord God! I do not know how to speak. I am too young!” But the Lord accepts no excuses: “Say not, ‘I am too young!’ To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak.” Jeremiah was not a happy traveler; small wonder, because the message he carried would make him unpopular: “Woe to me, my mother, that you gave me birth! A man of strife and contention to all the land! I neither borrow nor lend, yet everyone curses me.” He was thrown in prison, put in the stocks, almost lynched because he warned of the downfall of the city and destruction of the Temple. He was hated and despised by the people.

Today’s first reading illustrates the mood Jeremiah had reached. Our lectionary has him complaining of being “duped,” but the revised NAB more accurately has “seduced,” the term used of the seduction of a virgin. “The word of the Lord has brought me derision.” He reached the point where he says, in effect, “Basta! No more! No more

prophesying for me!" But then he realizes that he can no more give up his call to proclaim God's word than he can give up life. He describes it as a "fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones"--it had to burst out willy-nilly. He could not dissuade the people from a superstitious faith in the inviolability of the Temple. He failed to persuade them to give up a suicidal resistance to the Babylonians, and therefore Judah fell. The survivors dragged him along as they fled to Egypt. Jewish tradition has it that he was stoned to death as he continued to admonish them. Only very late in the OT is this judgment on him finally pronounced: "This is a man who loves his fellow Jews and fervently prays for the people and the holy city" (2 Macc 15:14). He appeared to be a failure as a prophet, but authors speak of his Golgotha because he was a type of Christ.

The gospel also tells us about a vocation, that of Jesus—and it also touches on ours. This gospel passage follows directly on that of last week. Peter had just declared his faith that Jesus is the Messiah and been praised and rewarded by Jesus. Perhaps that emboldened him to think he could advise Jesus. When Jesus said that He will have to suffer and die Peter's reaction is, "This can't be! This must not be! You are the Messiah, You are Israel's king! Having revealed yourself to us, you must now reveal yourself to all the people, must receive the honor and glory that is your due." Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Peter was foolish and slow of heart to believe all

that the prophets had spoken, e.g., that he would be led like a lamb to the slaughter.

At any rate, Jesus gave them plenty of instruction in what was to befall Him. Matthew has this prediction of His passion two more times, and Mark and Luke, likewise, have it three times. At one point Luke comments, “But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was hidden from them so that they should not understand it, and they were afraid to ask him about this saying.” Both Mark and Matthew quote Jesus as saying, “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for the many.” Today Jesus tells Peter off in no uncertain terms. Jesus calls him “Satan” and says, “You are an obstacle to me” In the desert Jesus had said, “Begone, Satan,” when Satan had suggested He perform marvelous works that would reveal Him as the Messiah, but without going the way of the cross, as was His Father’s will.

Jesus did not gladly embrace suffering. There was no one in Palestine who had not seen victims of crucifixion hanging by the side of the road; it was a horrible lingering way to die. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed at first, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Let this chalice pass me by.” What a heart-rending prayer for a loving, all-powerful Father to refuse! After more prayer, His word was, “My Father, if it is not possible that this chalice pass without my drinking it, your will be done.”

Luke says, “He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.” Even John, who does not recount the agony in the garden, has Jesus say, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.... I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” We all know the sequel. Jesus did drink the chalice His Father gave Him; the Son of Man gave His life for the redemption of the many. But there followed the glorious Easter morn and salvation was opened for us all.

But don't go away: there is also something here about your vocation. After Jesus discusses His vocation, He adds: “whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” This is not a call to great mortification. Jesus and His disciples seem not to have fasted, as did the disciples of the Baptist and the Pharisees; He says He came eating and drinking and was subsequently accused of intemperance. No, this is something much graver. To take up the cross and follow Jesus is to go with Him to crucifixion. And we know we are called even to the sacrifice of life, if fidelity to our faith demands it. But St. Luke makes a small but significant change in Jesus' words on cross-bearing: "let him take up his cross **DAILY** and follow me." It is not a matter of dying but a manner of living. We follow Jesus in the way of the cross by living faithfully and accepting patiently those trials that come to

us. And they do come to all of us. Sometimes big trials. By accepting them patiently we share in the cross of Christ. St. Benedict echoes this in his Rule with the words: "Never swerving from God's instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching ... until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom."