



12th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A: Those who used to be my friends watched for my fall

Homily by Fr Robbie Low

Readings: Jeremiah 20:10-13; Ps 69; Romans 5:12-15; Matthew 10:26-33

'All those who used to be my friends watched for my fall' Jeremiah 20:10 f.

Reading the great and much mentally tortured and physically abused prophet Jeremiah, one is frequently reminded of the old saw: 'Just because you are paranoid, it doesn't mean that they're not out to get you.'

Jeremiah has a job that he does not want. It is a job that no-one in his right mind would want. He is a prophet of God. This means telling a smug and lapsed nation what they do not want to hear.

Jeremiah is doing this against a background of international diplomacy which is intended to ensure his country's safety in a world dominated by two huge, brutal and competing powers.

His advice is unwelcome. The fact that it comes from God Himself is fiercely disputed by both the 'church' and the 'state'. He is rejected at the court and many seek his death. He is rejected by the religious authorities

who have long ago ceased to employ the name of God for anything other than a rubber stamp for their own opinions and interests.

Jeremiah's advice is to stop dallying with Egypt and accept that the nation of Judah should accept the hegemony of the Babylonians. This is not ideal but, as it turns out, infinitely preferable to the alternative, when it comes.

The alternative turns out to be the crushing defeat of Judah, the siege of Jerusalem, starvation and ruin. This is followed by the blinding of the king but not before he has had to witness the torture and murder of his sons and then the wholesale transportation of the remnant of Judah into exile.

The Temple of God lies in ruins, not one brick upon another.

Jeremiah's experience is light years away from our own in terms of immediate brutal consequences but there are disturbing parallels.

The re-ordering of the security arrangements of our nation, urgent and overdue, is now high up on the menu of our political lives. The relations between the superpowers are shifting on unseen, tectonic plates. Our alliances are constantly called into question by the most trivial events before we even get to the major hot spots, wars and movements of people.

Behind all this lies a bigger question. And that is, not to be teased out in political or military preparation. It is the question of this nation's commitment to God. We can increase our defence spending many times over - and there is, in human terms, a good case for so doing. But nothing will happen to save us from the clash of empires without repentance and turning back to God. The land, if it has lost its faith, is like the salt that has lost its savour – fit only for the dungheap.

And the crisis of our times is no different, in essence, from that of the Age of Jeremiah. How we will answer it will determine the futures of our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren.

We have to turn back to God, personally, in community, nationally etc.

For most of my lifetime we have been committing a slow-motion historical and cultural suicide. Obsessed with the material world, we

have, wholesale, abandoned our churches, preferred the ways of the ungodly and departed from the way of the Lord, preferring the fleeting 'wisdom' of the world and the fashions of our times to the eternal truths of God.

When we do, individually, make a stand for the things of God, we do well to recall the cost and see if we have the spiritual capital to engage and defeat the works of the ancient Enemy of Man.

This is the challenge of our time – to realign our lives with the purposes of God and to encourage, at every twist and turn, others to do the same. In the light of this primary need for witness, whatever the cost – and for Jeremiah it was high – we are required to examine ourselves and to recommit to Jesus. To listen to His Word and be obedient to it and have our lives conformed to Him.

When we do this we will, like Jeremiah, meet opposition from the world and not least, meet hostility from those we counted as friends.

Indeed, if we did not meet opposition that would be more worrying for the Old Enemy of Man is seldom interested us in an inert state. But, once we begin to move for God, alarm bells sound in the dungeons of Hell and we will experience attack from the most unlikely quarters.

The attacks are both evidence of our being on the Divine Way and also a severe compliment to our determination and faithfulness.

We are to remain steadfast, unbending, consistent, loving and purposeful in the things of God. We do not seek opposition but we cannot compromise with the false agenda of our times. We are not motivated by hatred or anger but by a deep and abiding love of our land and its people and a hearty desire for its reconversion and a wholesale and urgent return to the saving faith of Christ. Our suffering or being held in contempt is a small price to pay for this glorious hope and this eternally desirable end.

This is the very heart and soul and purpose of the Mission of the Church and we must be about her ever urgent business.