

**Facing persecution without Fear – 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A
June 21st, 2020 (Jeremiah 20:10-13, Romans 2:12-15, Matthew 10:26-33)**

Dear brothers and sisters, any remnant of Easter joy has ended this Sunday and today's readings focus on our very human life. As I was reflecting on the readings especially the first reading from the prophet Jeremiah, I was reminded of my experience in my former parish. After mass one Sunday morning, as I came out of the church, I saw one of the cars parked outside having an inscription written on the plate which read "Why me, Lord.?" Later when I found the owner of the car and he narrated his story to me, I realised he had every right to say, "Why me, Lord?"

This is a question that comes up in our lives sometimes. "Why me, Lord?" I have asked this question many times in my priestly ministry and I know you too might have asked that countless times in your life. This question, "why me, Lord?" in the midst of persecution is what all the three readings of today seek to answer. The readings are giving us this encouraging answer, "Do not be afraid for the Lord is with you in times of persecution."

The 1st reading reminds us of the prophet Jeremiah who also wondered "why me, Lord?" Jeremiah prophesied for forty turbulent years of anarchy, war and exile. Throughout his years of prophesying, everyone turned against him – family, friends, kings, and even his fellow prophets. Jeremiah criticised the status quo, preached God's anger against the people for their sins. Jeremiah was a holy man who was hated for doing good and claiming that he is a prophet from God.

Today's text Jeremiah 20:10-13 describes the personal hatred the people had against him. This is what Jeremiah says, "I hear many whisperings. Terror is on every side. 'Denounce him. Let us denounce him,' say all my friends watching for my fall. 'Perhaps he will be deceived, then we can overcome him, and take our revenge on him.'" Jeremiah's friends were watching him closely to see how they could destroy him. His hometown and his family wanted to see him dead too. So, Jeremiah has every cause to lament, "why me, Lord?" He was like the light of God that disturbs those who prefer to live in darkness and they certainly react by opposition. Yet in all of this, the prophet believed in God's abiding presence. He said, "the Lord is with me," perhaps he remembered the promise God made to him earlier, "they will fight against you, but they will not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the lord, to deliver you." (Jeremiah 1:19)

In the gospel, Jesus tells his apostles not to fear during persecutions. He tells them, "Do not be afraid, for everything that is now covered will be uncovered. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops." Jesus knows that fear and the threat of death can throw us into confusion. So, he further tells us "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." He says, even every hair on your head has been counted and not even one sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing it. You are worth more than a hair and a sparrow so there is no need to be afraid.

After St. Paul suffered numerous imprisonments, physical abuses and threats of death, he had this to say, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardships, or sin, or sickness, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or death?... nothing can separate us from the love of God." (Romans 8:35-36). In today's 2nd reading, Paul says we inherited sin from the disobedience of our first parents Adam and Eve and this has brought about death and sufferings, but Christ

obedience has brought us eternal. As Paul says, “what then are we to say about these things? If God is for us who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Let us have the confidence and trust that our Lord Jesus Christ is on our side to deliver us from persecutions and death. **Amen.**

By Fr. Emmanuel Subaar