

**Ordinary 30**  
**10.27.24**

When you attend Mass, there's a good chance that you're expecting to hear readings and a homily that focus on comfort, mercy, and healing. That would be the case at most Masses. But last Thursday, at our weekly school Mass, we heard these words from Jesus, "do you think that I have come to establish peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Luke 12:49-53). Well, at least that explains why in-laws don't ever seem to get along.

In my homily at that Mass, I shared with the children, teachers, and parents in attendance at Mass that Jesus reminds us that living as his disciples will sometimes cause division. I gave them some examples from their daily encounters where that might happen. And I encouraged them to attempt to focus on and live out two of the core values of our school – integrity and courage. The children and I had a brief dialogue about how integrity means being faithful and true to a higher good; and courage is what enables us to act with integrity. I added that we must act with integrity and do so with courage even when others might reject us because of the stand we take for good and how we choose to act.

On the surface, today's first reading from the prophet Jeremiah and the passage from the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Mark's gospel initially seem to focus on comfort and healing. But the background to these two texts tells a different story.

The prophet Jeremiah preached some 600 years before the birth of Christ. He was addressing a people who were exiles – that is, they were driven from their native land of Israel and had to take up residence in hostile neighboring countries. That exile happened because the people and those who were leading the Israelites made unholy alliances with their neighboring kings and nations – against the advice of the prophets like Jeremiah. Because of their unfaithfulness, the people of Israel lost everything. Jeremiah told them that the losses they experienced and their exile came about because they drifted away from their faith and from God. Through his preaching Jeremiah challenged the people to change, something they didn't want to do. They even went so far as to try to kill Jeremiah in order to silence him. The entire book of Jeremiah is filled with the tension that results from the prophet challenging the people to change and the peoples' resistance to his preaching. The passage we hear today is the exception. In these few verses, Jeremiah tells the people that peace and blessings will be theirs if and when they turn back to God.

Today's gospel has a parallel theme. Up to this point, Jesus is preaching repentance to those whose hearts are far away from the Father. He is preaching in Jericho, the last stop before he heads to Jerusalem where he will encounter hostility from the religious elites and the Romans, eventually leading to his crucifixion.

In these few verses, we hear about the tension present among the people who surround Jesus. A blind man cries out to Jesus, but the crowd tries to silence him. They reason that the man is blind because of some sin he has committed. They don't see him as equal with them. They think it would be beneath Jesus to deal with him.

But Jesus calls him. The underlying sense is that Jesus sees more faith in this blind man than he sees in the so-called religious leaders and folks who are following him. Jesus is siding with the blind man and challenging the self-righteous religious leaders to change their sinful ways. But those leaders and the self-righteous are only thinking how they can do away with Jesus. It is apparent that Jesus is looked upon with the same contempt that the prophet Jeremiah experienced when trying to lead his people to conversion and a new way of life with the Lord.

It is also interesting that the people who can see, the so-called religious and faithful, are blind to Jesus. Yet, it is the blind man who sees, spiritually sees, who Jesus is. The blind man calls Jesus the “Son of David” – identifying him as the promised Messiah. No one else in the crowd does that.

You may have also noted in today’s gospel that as the blind man gets ready to go to Jesus, he takes off his cloak and leaves it there. In the time of Jesus, the outer cloak which a man wore sometimes identified what house he belonged to. We see something similar with the outer garment or chasuble a priest wears at Mass. That garment usually has religious symbols on it to remind him and all who look upon it whose house we belong to – namely the house of Christ.

The blind man leaves that cloak behind. That action tells us he doesn’t want to be the same. He wants to change. He wants to become more like Christ, he wants to put on Christ and live like him. After he is healed, the man is invited to follow Jesus. The path Jesus is calling him to means traveling to Jerusalem and uniting himself with Jesus – who will die and eventually rise from the dead.

While we usually hope that the Word of God proclaimed at Mass will bring comfort and peace, today’s passages should challenge us a bit. As with the blind man, this reading should motivate us to look at what sinful ways or habits we need to leave behind. It is never comfortable acting differently or giving up our sinful behaviors. But doing so is what leads us to everlasting life. Like the children were challenged at Mass last Thursday, we should examine ourselves to ensure that we are living with integrity and doing so courageously, no matter how we are treated by family, friends, or co-workers as we try to be faithful to and live out the message of the gospel.

In these days leading up to the election on November 5<sup>th</sup>, I keep telling folks I am so looking forward to November 6<sup>th</sup>. I can’t wait for the negative ads, the backbiting, and vile statements made about political opponents to cease – for a little while, at least. For sure, in this election cycle as with others these past few years, integrity and living out that integrity with courage have been in short supply. But rather than point the finger at others, today’s gospel challenges me to look at my own heart and my own actions. I need to examine where I have to change. I need to be honest about how I haven’t lived with integrity and ask for the courage to live more like Christ. Winning an election isn’t a sign of integrity or courageous on the part of a political candidate. But acting like Christ is.

May we join the blind man in today’s gospel by courageously standing up and casting off our old way of life and sinful deeds. Only when we do so will we truly see, and truly live as Christ’s disciples.

Amen? Amen!