

June 21, 2020: 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Year A

First Reading: Jeremiah 20.10-13

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 69.7-9, 13+16, 32-33, 35ab+36 (R. 13)

Second Reading: Romans 5.12-15

Gospel: Matthew 10.26-33

Homily by Fr. Robert Weaver

“No justice! No peace! No justice! No peace!” Chants like these have been heard in different parts of the world following the recent and tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, when his life came to a brutal end after being taken into police custody. So, we pray for the salvation of Mr. Floyd and for the healing of his family, friends, and all who were involved.

Following George’s death there were several services for him and I listened to the eulogy at one of these that was given by the Baptist minister Rev. Al Sharpton. I would like to share some of this eulogy with you. I won’t repeat it “word-for-word” but here is the essence of some of Rev. Al’s words:

“God always uses unlikely people to do his will. If George Floyd had been an Ivy league school graduate, and one of these ones with a long title, we would have been accused of reacting to his prominence. If he’d been a multimillionaire, they would have said that we were reacting to his wealth. If he had been a famous athlete, as he was on the trajectory to be, [they’d] have said we were reacting to his fame.”

“But God took an ordinary [man]... from the housing projects...[a man] that nobody thought much about [except] those that knew him and loved him. [God] took the rejected stone, the stone that the builder rejected. [People] rejected [George] for jobs. They rejected him for positions.

[And yet] God took [this] rejected stone and made him a cornerstone of a movement that's going to change the whole wide world [that is, a greater recognition of the equality and dignity of all peoples, no matter what their ethnic background is.]

(Source: <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/reverend-al-sharpton-george-floyd-funeral-eulogy-transcript-june-9>).

Some powerful words by Rev. Sharpton here.

Now, in Acts 4, the apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaims that Jesus is “the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the cornerstone” (v. 11). In other words, Jesus died at the hands of those leaders who rejected him yet we all have access to salvation through his glorious Death and Resurrection.

So, when Rev. Sharpton said that George Floyd was a rejected stone who became a cornerstone, we can apply this to mean that all of us, as imperfect as we are, are called to endure trials and even rejection for the glory of God. All of are called to be cornerstones in union with the perfect and ultimate cornerstone, the Word through whom all things have come to be, **Jesus Christ** (Jn 1:3).

In today's culture it is not easy to be a disciple of Jesus. There are many pagan-like beliefs floating around regarding human life, human sexuality, the family, and spirituality that are not in line with what we know as Catholic-Christians to be true. So, it is not always easy to share with others our beliefs for this can bring about disapproval or even rejection. Indeed, this is difficult - in fact, it can be **downright scary**.

Likewise, living in the midst of a pandemic is also unsettling and even scary. It is great that we are physically gathering together again as a parish community for Mass and that the restrictions are being eased but we know that “we are not out of the woods yet”; COVID-19 cases still abound and so we must remain diligent in our efforts to practice physical distancing and to look after ourselves and each other. Obviously, none of us would have chosen this situation and it brings with it stress, anxiety, and fear.

That being said, in our Gospel reading today Our Lord provides us with strength and courage with his words. He says, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul....Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father...So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

In other words, our loving God will guard and protect us as we face rejection and danger. This is not to say that nothing unwanted can ever happen to us, we know it can, but we must trust that God will always bring about what is best for us – he always “has our back.”

And in keeping with God’s constant care for us, Jesus says something else in today’s Gospel reading that is very intriguing, He says, “what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.” What you hear whispered.....have you ever thought about how God whispers to us?

I had one such experience not long ago. One day I was in All Saints church feeling somewhat distressed. And then, as I looked towards the suspended image of the ascending Jesus above the altar, I heard God’s whisper, not with my ears but with my mind and heart, telling me to persevere and that everything was going to be alright. I experienced that gentle yet persistent surge of strength and courage that comes from hearing God’s whisper.

People hearing God’s whisper has a lengthy tradition. For instance, in the Old Testament, 1 Kings describes how the prophet Elijah became very discouraged and distressed due to the ongoing persecution he faced from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, both of whom promoted paganism. In fact, he became so disheartened that he wanted to die.

(See: 1 Kings 19; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahab>).

The Scriptures (1 Kings 19) tell us that an angel of the Lord then nourished Elijah with food and drink and from there he went to Mt. Horeb for further refreshment. And the Scriptures explain that with Elijah on the mountain a great wind blew but the Lord was not in the wind. After that came a great earthquake but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And then came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. But then came a tiny whispering sound. It was the whisper of God!

It was this whisper that got Elijah's attention and God gave Elijah the strength and courage he needed to continue his mission and to appoint a spiritual successor named Elisha. This highlights the transformative power of God's gentle whisper!

(See: <http://www.churchofthecov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Noticing-Gods-Gentle-Whisper-8.27.17.pdf>.)

A bright side of this pandemic-lockdown is that it has prompted us to cultivate our relationship with the Lord through personal prayer. And it is during prayer that we hear God's whisper. As the 19th century British preacher Charles Spurgeon noted, you cannot cause God's whisper, or his still, small voice, to be heard, but it is by putting ourselves before the Lord in quiet prayer that we make ourselves available to hear his whisper. And when God whispers to us, it is spiritually "loud enough" that we keep hearing it for a long time!

(See: <http://www.churchofthecov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Noticing-Gods-Gentle-Whisper-8.27.17.pdf>.)

Going back to today's Gospel reading, recall that Jesus tells us that we are to "proclaim from the housetops" the saving message he whispers to us. In other words, we are to boldly proclaim the truth of the Risen Lord to the broader culture through our words and actions. This would be too much for us if we were to rely solely on our own efforts. Instead, let us draw courage from God's whisper. Let us draw courage from the Prince of Peace, our Messiah and our Savior. **Let us draw courage from the stone that the builders rejected but which has become the cornerstone (Ps 118:22)!**