

Today we hear the sorrowful lament of Jeremiah the Prophet. His sense of being overwhelmed is echoed in the English word we have, “Jeremiad,” which the dictionary defines as a prayer of long lamentation or complaint. In this reading he is really fed up and even asks that his adversaries get what is coming to them. He will have to get over that and let go; and he eventually does that. Sometimes all we can do is complain and lament to God and get it all out and then let it go.

The gospel continues Jesus’ words to his apostles as he prepares them for missionary work on the road. They are not to be afraid. “Fear no one.” I think it helps if we think more of positively summoning up our courage and face the problems that inevitably come our way. Courage serves us in ordinary ways and in extraordinary ways. In our divided country and polarized church that we now live in, courage is needed more than ever.

Parents need courage to raise children today. Spouses need courage to keep growing in relational love. All of us need courage to stand up for the rights and needs of the people who need healing and support. We have to stop idolizing the rich and powerful, celebrities, athletic and entertainment heroes. We have to cease escaping from the challenges of life and society and stop seeking comfort and a stress free life. Every day, thankfully, we meet courageous people – a mother whose 27 year old son died of an overdose; a spouse who has to place her husband of 62 years in an institution where attention and care will be given; and there is the person who has some terminal disease and struggles with wanting to end one’s own life. There are so many courageous people all around us. They are in our midst.

Amidst the scandals of our church, there are still many persons who are courageous to give themselves to others, even at life’s peril at times. There have been Religious Sisters who have stayed in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries where there is violence or suppression. There is a community of Benedictine nuns in Ukraine who take in everybody in need of food or shelter. There are Sisters at our American-Mexican borders offering help to those who seek a better life. There are Sisters, priests and lay people on the front lines everywhere in our own country and other countries as well.

Dorothy Day who struggled for years to help the poor, kept her faith and her courage. One of her guiding aphorisms was “Make yourself deeply uncomfortable.” (Now, that’s a bumper sticker!) You can still see that lived out at Catholic Worker houses, for instant Casa San Diego in Houston.

Many people from the Latin American countries have been fleeing their homes because of violence and lack of human rights. Our country has been complicit at times in aiding the rich and taking advantage of the poor. The church, in countries that are largely Catholic, has spoken out at times and paid the price. The murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero in San Salvador in 1981 is well known. But that violence hasn’t ended. In Nicaragua Christian voices have criticized the government for the abuse of human rights. In the past year over 200 priests and catechists were arrested, jailed, and then released on the basis that they would leave the country. Many were flown to the States. Bishop Rolando Alvarez, 56 year old bishop and native Nicaraguan, a critic of the system, refused to leave the people. He is now in prison for a 26 year sentence and has been stripped of his citizenship. The government wants to destroy the Catholic Church. On the way they are making martyrs. This bishop and others are courageous. They inspire me.

I do not share any of this with you in order to move you to guilt or shame. No, not at all. Be grateful for what you have and how you share with others. But, as our culture seems to be disintegrating, we may have to adjust our view of life itself, to rethink why we are here on this planet, how we can be courageous in doing what we can.

Suffering is not a good or desirable thing but it is an inescapable part of human living. The challenge is what we do with it. We can curse it and blame someone, including God. We can try to escape it with money or power. Or we can face life, not be afraid, but have courage to face reality. We can stop moaning about our little first world inconveniences and learn to live more simply. We can let go of some things, as well as people, who do not help us to follow Jesus.

There is an old Irish saying that every Irish man or woman knows that life will break your heart. This gospel today is for those who have lived long enough to know that life indeed will break your heart. How else can we be ready to carry one another in times of sorrow? How else can we be able to hold the human stories all around us and learn to give ourselves in love?

Some day, when we meet God, we will recognize that divine love has always been with us, consoling and challenging us. How can it be otherwise? Our way to God is through the mystery of the human heart and through the mystery of Jesus' heart. So lift up your heart, draw up your courage, follow the way of Jesus, and fear not.

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