

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Let us remind ourselves of the opportunities we have been given to proclaim the Gospel to others, through our words and through our lives.

*PSALM 69*

- 8 For your sake have I suffered reproach;  
shame has covered my face.
- 9 I have become a stranger to my kindred,  
an alien to my mother's children.
- 10 Zeal for your house has eaten me up;  
the scorn of those who scorn you has fallen upon me.
- 11 I humbled myself with fasting,  
but that was turned to my reproach.
- 18 Answer me, Lord, for your loving-kindness is good;  
turn to me in the multitude of your mercies.
- 19 Hide not your face from your servant;  
be swift to answer me, for I am in trouble.
- 20 Draw near to my soul and redeem me;  
deliver me because of my enemies.

*Thirsting on the cross,  
your Son shared the reproach of the oppressed  
and carried the sins of all;  
in him, O God, may the despairing find you,  
the afflicted gain life  
and the whole creation know its true king,  
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*1<sup>st</sup> READING*

*Jeremiah 20.7-13*

*God's prophets may be mocked and denounced by doubters, but remaining faithful and trusting in God's promises, they will be vindicated.*

O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long.

But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him."

But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonour will never be forgotten.

O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.

This is the word of the Lord.

#### *2<sup>nd</sup> READING*

*Romans 6.1b-11*

*Our baptism is an outward sign of our unity with Christ; it is also a sign of death to sin and of the end of sin's power over us.*

Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

This is the word of the Lord.

#### *THE GOSPEL.*

*Matthew 10.24-39*

*Jesus tells his apostles not to fear persecution, but to proclaim his message boldly. They can take heart because they are dear to God and he will not forget them.*

Jesus said: "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who

kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

This is the Gospel of the Lord

### *HOMILY*

The French philosopher Pascal once said that there are two kinds of servant – those who go ahead with torches to light the way, and those who come behind carrying the bags. St Teresa of Avila, the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic and Carmelite nun, was of the first kind. Her way was one of asceticism and sanctity, resulting in her most famous work *The Way of Perfection*. This “way”, unfortunately, was not appreciated by her fellow sisters in the convent. When Teresa called for reform, their response was to throw her out, and on one occasion she was turned out at night in the middle of a rainstorm. Dressed from head to toe in her coarse wool habit, she got into her donkey cart and was riding along when a wheel went into a ditch and the cart turned over, dumping her into the mud. She sat there, in mud-soaked wool, looked up to heaven, and said, “Lord, if this is the way you treat your friends, it’s no wonder you don’t have many.”

Frustrated though she was, Teresa did not give up on God, even when her fellow sisters fought her every step of the way. She kept teaching what she knew to be the truth, and eventually she won the battle. Her desire was not to be right but to be faithful and obedient, and God rewarded her efforts.

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, three times he told them not to be afraid, because he knew the message would be unpopular. As in St Teresa’s message, there were significant elements of sacrifice and self-denial. Jesus had been given a hard time so the disciples should expect the same treatment. Jesus had not come to bring tranquillity to the world but the opposite. Families would be divided, he predicted, and set against each other. His followers were to accept the demands and difficulties of the teaching and follow faithfully – or be judged accordingly. To gain true life would involve painful sacrifices and if that meant death – death of the body – that was an outcome preferable to the destruction of both body and soul in hell. Don’t be afraid, the disciples were reminded; they were of more value than the common sparrow. In fact, they were crucial to the mission. After Jesus’ death, the good news of eternal life would be entrusted to the disciples to “proclaim from the housetops”.

Six hundred years before Jesus sent out the disciples, God commissioned the prophet Jeremiah to deliver a similarly unpopular message. Initially he was steadfast, despite his dire forebodings being ridiculed by Israel's leaders. But when ridicule changed to retribution and Jeremiah was flogged and put in the stocks, his trust in God's protection evaporated. God had duped and misused him, he complained.

Similarly, when the going got tough, some of Jesus' disciples decided they had been misled as well. Why was the message so difficult? Why all this negative stuff, this harshness and division? Isn't the yoke supposed to be easy, the burden light? Don't you want, Lord, to make friends and influence people? Don't you appreciate that these days people get upset when they feel they are missing out on something, never mind losing their life? What is achieved by setting families at each other's throats? On and on the questions could go – and Christians today might find sympathy with some of them.

And then, gently, when the complaints are over, God brings followers back from all negative thinking. Back, possibly, to what Jeremiah called a "burning fire" moment. The realisation that God's claim on us – mentally, physically, spiritually – is beyond our power to resist. Back to reflecting that God does have a point. Why should we expect life to be cushy and cushioned from cradle to grave? God has important evangelising work for us to do, and, like Jeremiah and Teresa, we are to be the first kind of servant, those who go ahead with torches to light the way. When life gets difficult – and it most certainly has been in these last few months - God will be a "dread warrior" on our behalf. God, as we are assured at the end of Matthew's Gospel, will be with us always.

#### *COLLECT PRAYER*

Lord, you have taught us  
that all our doings without love are nothing worth:  
send your Holy Spirit  
and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,  
the true bond of peace and of all virtues,  
without which whoever lives is counted dead before you.  
Grant this for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen