

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah:

In those days, the princes said to the king: "Jeremiah ought to be put to death; he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such things to them; he is not interested in the welfare of our people, but in their ruin." King Zedekiah answered: "He is in your power"; for the king could do nothing with them. And so they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Prince Malchiah, which was in the quarters of the guard, letting him down with ropes. There was no water in the cistern, only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. Ebed-melech, a court official, went there from the palace and said to him: "My lord king, these men have been at fault in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah, casting him into the cistern. He will die of famine on the spot, for there is no more food in the city." Then the king ordered Ebed-melech the Cushite to take three men along with him, and draw the prophet Jeremiah out of the cistern before he should die.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 40:2, 3, 4, 18

**Lord, come to my aid!**

I have waited, waited for the Lord, and he stooped toward me.

**Lord, come to my aid!**

The Lord heard my cry. He drew me out of the pit of destruction, out of the mud of the swamp; he set my feet upon a crag; he made firm my steps.

**Lord, come to my aid!**

And he put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God. Many shall look on in awe and trust in the Lord.

**Lord, come to my aid!**

Though I am afflicted and poor, yet the Lord thinks of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, hold not back!

**Lord, come to my aid!**

SECOND READING: Hebrews 12:1-4

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews:

Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 12:49-53

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the 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."

The Gospel of the Lord



## **Hebrews 12:1-4**

12<sup>1</sup> With so many witnesses in a great cloud all around us, we too, then, should throw off everything that weighs us down and the sin that clings so closely, and with perseverance keep running in the race which lies ahead of us.\*<sup>2</sup> Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which lay ahead of him, he endured the cross, disregarding the shame of it, and *has taken his seat at the right of God's throne*.<sup>3</sup> Think of the way he persevered against such opposition from sinners<sup>a</sup> and then you will not lose heart and come to grief.<sup>4</sup> In the fight against sin, you have not yet had to keep fighting to the point of bloodshed.\*<sup>1</sup>

## **Reflection for the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year C**

“Lord, come to my aid!” a powerful prayer and so simple to make. I pray this each time I sit down to prepare a homily or reflection. And do you know what? It always works. Within the scriptures I find the words to say. It is God's Word with which I preach. Hopefully, God always speaks through the words I find in prayer. If you hear God's word through them, my prayer that begins my reflection works for you too.

I want to begin, today, with the reading from Hebrews. I am not always fond of the translation that the bishops have chosen for us. It reads in stilted, unclear English. We are members of Jesus' Church. We are believers in God and Jesus together, as we gather. Jesus is in our midst. This is the context of what the letter says. We are on our way to the Kingdom of God to come when Jesus returns. Jesus had us in mind when he died on the cross. He knew he would rise to give us new life in him. Within our context of faith and faith's witness, it is easier to turn from sin.

We live in Jesus' presence always. He promised to remain with us until he returns. Just like we won't speed on the interstate when we see a cop-car behind us; it's harder to commit sin with Jesus near us. Jesus is always much nearer than our beating hearts. With Jesus so near, we need not struggle so hard to live his life. We can rely on his strength as God. We don't have to shed any blood because Jesus did it for us. And if we fail and sin, as Jesus knows we will, Jesus' infinite, eternal and unconditional love is ever present to forgive us and reconcile us to him. We

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\* Gn 4:7; Ga 5:7d; 2:10; Mt 4:3–11par.; Jn 6:15

\* 2 Co 8:9; Ph 2:6–8; Ps 110:1; Ac 2:33t

\* Lk 2:34; 10:32seq.

<sup>1</sup> [\*The New Jerusalem Bible\*](#) (Heb 12:1–4). (1990). Doubleday.

also live within a community of faith that can support us as we give witness to our faith. I'll include a smoother translation of this passage from the New Jerusalem Bible.

Jeremiah prayed the above prayer too; I am sure, as he sank, mired in mud and underground, trapped in the cistern. As it happened, there was no entrapping of God's Word or God's prophet. Ebed-melech, the Cushite set the Word and prophet free. I wonder, why did scripture relate that he was a foreigner and most likely a Jewish convert? Cush was a land south of Egypt in the Horn of East Africa. This man was African, an Ethiopian. His name means Servant of the King. In this context, he may have served Zedekiah, who was king. But the true king of Judah was God. He acted as a servant of God when he rescued Jeremiah from certain death. He was the means through whom God had answered Jeremiah's prayer for God's help.

We have many representations of Jesus. There are icons, paintings and depictions of Jesus in film. In every culture, Jesus is depicted through the ethnic eyes of their respective cultures. Some of these images depict Jesus powerfully. Some depict him as a wimp. Jesus, the gentle shepherd, gentle preacher and gentle healer, contrasts greatly from today's image of Jesus as a powerful and fiery man of passion. We can define passion in a few ways. Passion can be agonized suffering, powerful love and vision of what's true. In this passage, Jesus encompasses all three meanings of passion.

He is fixed upon his mission as Messiah and Son of God. His mission was to culminate in his cross. He was to die out of love for each of us and the entire human race. His cross and resurrection led to his ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. As a result of these events, the apostles spread the gospel of salvation and founded the Church to which we now belong. We live in light of these events. Yet Jesus mission is not yet over. We, as his church, continue his mission. We, as people of faith, give our witness to Jesus and bring the gospel into the waiting world. Jesus' promised peace will not be fully realized until he returns to complete his mission and establish, for all eternity, the Kingdom of God.

Jesus also predicted division. Our society remains divided through politics, religion, business interests, ethnicity and nationally. What has Jesus revealed to help our situation? We can never know God's mind. We can't even know our own, completely. But God has revealed his heart to us. We know it in God's Son, Jesus. Jesus reveals the passionate, infinite, eternal and unconditional love of God. In Jesus, God has revealed his ultimate nature; love. In revealing God to others, all we need do is love them. We can love our enemies as we pray for them the prayer of the responsorial, "Lord, come to our aid!" Even in our own families, to listen to another, without judgment, is an act of love. To invite another in love instead of nagging can reveal Jesus. In Jesus we are all one.

The Kingdom of God is our true goal. The return of Jesus completes God's eternal plan of salvation. When it happens, true peace will be ours. In the meantime, The Holy Spirit reveals the heart of God that Jesus has shown us. The love that saves us through the forgiveness of sins as the Lord answers our prayer. We are Jesus' witnesses as we spread his faith into a world that groans for his return.

May we know him as we gather for the breaking of the Bread of Life.

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