

HOMILY for 12TH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

Today 1st Reading & Gospel talk about feeling alone & discouraged on the spiritual journey at time. As I reflect on that message, I'm reminded this brand-new cute story that I want to share with you.

A priest & a businessman were playing golf. After playing several holes, the businessman's game takes a turn for the worse. "Damn! I missed!" he swears as his ball lands in a sand bunker.

The priest is understandably shocked & admonishes the businessman, "Do not swear, my son. You will incur God's wrath."

The next time the businessman fails, however, he exclaims again, "Damn! I missed!"

The priest gets very angry & scolds him severely, "My son, you place yourself in great jeopardy by your words!"

But alas, as the businessman's ball again fails to roll where he wants it to, he yells loudly, "Damn! I missed!"

Suddenly a lightning bolt strikes from the sky & reduces the priest to a pile of smoldering ash & a booming voice from Heaven shouts, "Damn! I missed!"

Sometimes that's what the faithful get while trying to do all the right things. Anyway, today's 1st Reading is nothing new to us believers. Since the beginning of Christianity, our faith has been ridiculed & persecuted. In fact, our Lord was wrongfully arrested & then hung high on the Cross. We Christians have been mocked, wrongfully accused, & persecuted in every way. Thousands of Christians have been martyred & continuously persecuted around the world. Even in a free society like ours, public policies have undermined & contradicted lots of our Christian teachings. That's why it does not surprise us to hear Jeremiah's message in today's 1st Reading, "...I [Jeremiah] hear the whisperings of many: 'Terror on every side! Denounce! Let us denounce him!' All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. 'Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail, & take our vengeance on him.'" Apparently that's what Jeremiah heard from his sold-out colleagues & people who turned away from Yahweh to worship the Babylonian gods. They no longer wanted to hear the truth from Jeremiah or any prophet who is faithful to Yahweh. Certainly Jeremiah felt like a lone ranger who was committed to serve Yahweh only despite all the threats & traps from his enemies.

Surely we Christians can relate to prophet Jeremiah & his lonesome feeling. We feel like a lone ranger who holds up the Cross of Christ & comes to Church regularly in a secular & materialistic world. Everyone would rather focus on material things & do whatever they like instead of following the Commandments of God. They think that praying & church going is boring & useless. They'd rather do fun things & avoid anything to do with rules & regulations. They think they're entitled to everything without having to roll up their sleeves to do anything. They assume the whole world has to focus on their needs instead of challenging themselves to make sacrifices for the common good. It's no wonder why our world has turned chaotic & upside down these days. Everyone no longer has respect for God or trusts in the Church & public institutions.

If you think living in a world without any respect for God & care for Community is difficult already, you should look at our cynical world where everyone thinks Christians are a bunch of hypocrites. It looks back on our Christian history & listed all sorts of mistakes that Christian leaders & believers have committed. The biggest mistake we Christians have heard from our secular & materialistic world is the Spanish Inquisitions. Our Christian leaders had allowed political leaders to manipulate our Christian faith for their personal ambition & get them to force people to convert to Christianity under the point of the sword. This campaign killed thousands of people & made Christianity bear bad name ever since. Another huge mistake we Christians have heard a lot lately is the sexual abuse scandal by clergy. Over the years many clergy have used their position to take advantage of others especially children for their own pleasure. That has made our secular & materialistic world hate us Christians even more. You don't know the pain & shame some Christians or a priest like me has to endure every day because of those bad clergy. But, sexual pleasure was not the only mistake some

clergy have done. One more mistake some bad clergy have committed was the materialistic corruption. They have taken public fund to pay for their particular lifestyle. Some church employees have done the same. Those are some of the reasons why our cynical world has turned against our Christian faith. Surely it's not easy to be a Christian believer or clergy these days.

But, let's not lose heart or feel discouraged. For the Lord will lift up our spirit & protect us from the danger of this world. Let me borrow these encouraging words from today's 1st Reading, "... But the Lord is with me [reflected Jeremiah], like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to shame, to lasting unforgettable confusion... Let me witness the vengeance you take on them, for to you I've entrusted my cause." Here's some more support from our Lord Jesus in today's Gospel, "Do not let people intimidate you... Do not fear those who deprive the body of life but cannot destroy the soul. Rather, fear the one who can destroy both body & soul in Gehenna." In case we still can't look past the persecution of our current world & continue to hold high the Cross of Christ, St. Paul has these words of encouragement in today's 2nd Reading, "... For if by the offense of the one man all died, much more did the grace of God & the gracious gift of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound for all." In other words, if the sins of our forefathers have brought us shame & pains, the grace of Jesus Christ is much more & it can erase all those sins & bring us joy & wonderful promises for the future.

My dear brothers & sisters, it's surely difficult to be a Christian in our current world. It takes courage & commitment to follow Jesus & share His Good News in our modern society. I thank God for your Christian faith & commitment to follow our Christian way of life. I pray that you will not lose heart & continue to hold high the Cross of Christ for the world to see & follow. Jesus really needs you to witness His Good News to our modern world. So, let me leave with you these inspiring words of our Lord in today's Gospel, "...Whoever acknowledges me before the world, I will acknowledge before my Father in Heaven. But whoever disowns me before the world, I will disown before my Father in Heaven."