

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

Psalms 71:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 15-17

1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13

Luke 4:21-30

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This is the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time. In Ordinary time, the First Reading is always especially chosen by the Church to complement the Gospel. So if we compare our First Reading and our Gospel, we ought to be able to find a common theme. Let's have a look. Our First Reading is from the first chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah. In the passage, the Lord tells Jeremiah that he, Jeremiah, has been appointed "prophet to the nations." And the Lord implies that the nations aren't going to like the message Jeremiah will be given to deliver. If he does his job properly, he will make many dangerous enemies. But the Lord assures Jeremiah that, try as they might, none of Jeremiah's enemies will be able to destroy him. The Lord says to Jeremiah, and here I quote from the passage, "I this day...have made you a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of brass, against the whole land." In short, God has made Jeremiah entirely safe from attack. He is *invulnerable*.

Now let's turn to the Gospel. *Here* we are in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Jesus is speaking at the synagogue in his hometown. His words *enrage* his listeners. They drive him out of town, intending to throw him headfirst from the height on which the town is built. "But," and here I quote, "Jesus passed through the midst of them and went

away.” It turns out, then, that despite all their fury, the angry mob cannot hurt Jesus. He is *invulnerable*.

So, there’s our common theme. Jesus, faithful as always to his Father’s will, is invulnerable to injury. And Jeremiah may proclaim God’s word secure in the knowledge that *he* is invulnerable to his enemies. It remains for us to ask how these scripture passages apply to us. We could conclude that if we, like Jesus and Jeremiah, remain courageously obedient to God’s will, we will be invulnerable to all harm. Now if the First Reading and the Gospel were *all* that the Church had given us for this Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, I could stop now and we would have had our shortest Scripture reflection ever. But there is still the matter of the Second Reading. And Second Readings cannot be counted upon to faithfully mirror the theme of the other two.

Our Second Reading is the famous passage from the First Letter to the Corinthians, in which Saint Paul describes love. You’ve probably heard it at about half of the weddings you’ve ever attended. Let me quote a few qualities Paul attributes to love that seem most relevant to our reflections today: “Love...does not brood over *injury*...It *bears* all things...hopes all things, *endures* all things.” Now I can’t even begin to claim that these words are about invulnerability. Quite to the contrary, they seem to be about *being* vulnerable and staying that way. And I think we’d all agree that that is, in fact, what love requires. If you are going to love you have to be willing to risk getting hurt. In fact, it’s probably fair to say that to love *always* involves suffering, if for no other reason than that when someone we love suffers, we suffer too.

So, if we take our Second Reading into account along with the other two, maybe the message we should take away today is not, “If you are

faithful you will be *invulnerable*,” but rather, “if you are faithful, God will *sustain* you in your vulnerability.” In faith, we need not be afraid to love for fear of suffering. We are free to love as Christ loved, in the sure hope that God will give us the grace and strength to endure whatever comes. We can allow ourselves to be vulnerable to the suffering of a grieving friend, or of a family member who has lost her job and her house. We can let ourselves feel the anguish of people in Syria, knowing the Lord will support us in our efforts to love.

And this is some of the best news imaginable because it means we needn't let fear prevent us from being human. For surely we creatures of the God who *is* Love *need* to love in order to be who we are created to be.