

## 22 OT Year A Readings and commentary

**Commentary by Dave Pitt:** In today's Gospel, Peter, given the responsibility of leading the Church in last week's Gospel reading, is chastised by Jesus for his lack of understanding. Just as described in today's passage from Romans, Peter is too "conformed to his age" to recognize the will of God. Jesus emphasizes that the will of God is self-sacrifice. If we wish to follow Jesus, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. Jesus is not speaking metaphorically. Like Jesus, and like Peter (eventually), we must be willing to die for God. Paul too describes the necessity of self-sacrifice. Instead of offering animal or grain sacrifices to God, Christians are to offer their entire lives as sacrifice. Every single act and every single thought is thus offered to God. While Paul's instruction might not require our own deaths, it certainly does not preclude it. We are, thus, called to die to ourselves, to our own wills, and to all that separates us from living in the covenant, which may, in the end, require martyrdom.

Jeremiah offers us a description of what this might mean. In standing against society, we are bound to become objects of laughter and mockery, derision and reproach. Is this not the societal fate of those who dare to critique the status quo in words and actions? Death to our will often means death to our reputation. Psalm 63 offers guidance here. In thirsting for God, in clinging to Him, we shall be upheld.

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**Lectionary Summary: Glenn CJ Byer:** In today's Gospel, Peter, given the responsibility of leading the Church in last week's Gospel reading, is chastised by Jesus for his lack of understanding. Just as described in today's passage from Romans, Peter is too "conformed to his age" to recognize the will of God. Jesus emphasizes that the will of God is self-sacrifice. If we wish to follow Jesus, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. Jesus is not speaking metaphorically. Like Jesus, and like Peter (eventually), we must be willing to die for God. Paul too describes the necessity of self-sacrifice. Instead of offering animal or grain sacrifices to God, Christians are to offer their entire lives as sacrifice. Every single act and every single thought is thus offered to God. While Paul's instruction might not require our own deaths, it certainly does not preclude it. We are, thus, called to die to ourselves, to our own wills, and to all that separates us from living in the covenant, which may, in the end, require martyrdom. Jeremiah offers us a description of what this might mean. In standing against society, we are bound to become objects of laughter and mockery,

derision and reproach. Is this not the societal fate of those who dare to critique the status quo in words and actions? Death to our will often means death to our reputation. Psalm 63 offers guidance here. In thirsting for God, in clinging to Him, we shall be upheld.

### **First Reading** Jeremiah 20:7-9

*The word of the Lord has brought me derision.*

### **A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah**

You duped me, O LORD, and I let myself be duped;  
you were too strong for me, and you triumphed.  
All the day I am an object of laughter;  
everyone mocks me.

Whenever I speak, I must cry out,  
violence and outrage is my message;  
the word of the LORD has brought me  
derision and reproach all the day.

I say to myself, I will not mention him,  
I will speak in his name no more.  
But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart,  
imprisoned in my bones;  
I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.

### **The word of the Lord**

**Commentary Jeremiah 20:7-9 by Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB:** These verses are taken from the final confession of Jeremiah (Jer 20:7-13). In these confessions, or more accurately complaints, Jeremiah explodes at God. He is overwhelmed with the challenges of proclaiming God's word and the unceasing suffering he is forced to endure. He feels that God has tricked him and overpowered him and then abandoned him (Jer 20:7). As a result Jeremiah is constantly humiliated and mocked. The very nature of his message put him at odds with his hearers. Everything he must say comes down to the same thing: violence and destruction. Jeremiah experiences no satisfaction or sense of accomplishment from this. For him, the word of God is nothing more than "a reproach and derision all day long" (Jer 20:8).

Jeremiah would like to stop preaching and cease being a prophet. Apparently he has even tried this but with no success. The word of God has taken hold of the very being of Jeremiah. It has to be proclaimed. If he tries to suppress it or in any way keep it locked up inside, this word of God becomes like a live flaming coal ready to totally consume him. He has to let it out (Jer 20:9). In other words, a prophet called by God cannot stop being a prophet. He cannot cease proclaiming the word of God no matter how upsetting that may be to the hearers. He cannot tone it down to protect himself from dangers. The reality is that the prophet is one seized by the word of God. It is not his own word and therefore he has no real control over it.

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### **Responsorial Psalm** Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

**℟(2b)** My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.

O God, you are my God whom I seek;  
for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts  
like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.

Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary  
to see your power and your glory,  
for your kindness is a greater good than life;  
my lips shall glorify you.

Thus will I bless you while I live;  
lifting up my hands, I will call upon your name.  
As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied,  
and with exultant lips my mouth shall praise you.

You are my help,  
and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.  
My soul clings fast to you;  
your right hand upholds me.

**Commentary: Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9 by John Paul Heil:** Main Theme: Only GOD can satisfy the deepest longings of our human condition.

The psalmist invites us to share his poetic pining and thirsting for the God he seeks--"like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water." We join the psalmist in glorifying God for the power and glory that is evident in his great kindness, which is a greater good than life itself. As long as we live, we will bless, lift up our hands in supplication, and call upon the name of God to fulfill the deepest longings of our souls. "As with the riches of a banquet" those longings will be satisfied by God. The lips and mouth that have drunk in the "water" that quenches the profound thirst of our souls will in turn exultantly praise God for providing this lasting refreshment and relief. In all of our longings God is our ultimate help. We can take shelter from life's bitterness, dryness, and unfulfilled expectations and shout for joy "in the shadow of your wings." When we "cling fast" to God and seek him as the final satisfaction for all that we pine and hope for in life, then his powerful "right hand" will uphold us.

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## **Second Reading Romans 12:1-2**

*Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.*

### **A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans**

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,  
to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,  
holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.  
Do not conform yourselves to this age  
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,  
that you may discern what is the will of God,  
what is good and pleasing and perfect.

### **The word of the Lord**

**Commentary: Romans 12:1-2 by Virginia Smith:** While the Letter to the Romans is widely considered the most highly theological of Paul's letters, it can be pragmatic as well. Today, we begin a section of the letter that brings that aspect to the fore. In his first eleven chapters,

Paul has preached in some detail what Jesus' redemption actually means to all disciples, both Jews and Gentiles. He has been at pains to explain what Jesus' death and resurrection signify and how baptism incorporates believers into God's own life.

Now, with Chapter 12, Paul begins to lay out what the Christian life involves...how Christians are to live in ways that make their value system distinct from that of the world around them. This is, if you will, the rubber hits the road section. From the distance of the 21st Century, we probably need to hear these essentials to our faith reiterated every bit as much as Paul's newly minted Christians needed to hear them for the first time.

In Verse 1, we are introduced to the notion of community as Paul asked his people to "*offer their bodies as a living sacrifice*". In the space of three words, plural becomes singular. Our individual offerings are interconnected into the single gift of God's own people. Next, Paul exhorts his audience not to "*...conform yourselves to this age...*" He might well have added, "*...or any other*". Christian value should get God's people apart. So in two short verses, we have two powerful ideas, enough for anyone to ponder during the week ahead.

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### **Gospel Acclamation** cf. Ephesians 1:17-18

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ  
enlighten the eyes of our hearts,  
that we may know what is the hope  
that belongs to our call.

### **Gospel** Matthew 16:21-27

*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself*

### **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew**

Jesus began to show his disciples  
that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly  
from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,  
and be killed and on the third day be raised.

Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him,  
"God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you."  
He turned and said to Peter,  
"Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.  
You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Then Jesus said to his disciples,  
"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself,  
take up his cross, and follow me.  
For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.  
What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world  
and forfeit his life?  
Or what can one give in exchange for his life?  
For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory,  
and then he will repay all according to his conduct."

## **The Gospel of the Lord**

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**Commentary: Matthew 16:21-27 by John Paul Heil:** Main Theme: Jesus calls us to lose our life in selfless service in order to find it. The Peter who just confessed Jesus to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God," the one whom Jesus designated as the "rock" upon whom he will build his church, and the one to whom he gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven, cannot accept Jesus' prediction of his suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus' pointed command to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!," has a double meaning. It means get out of the way, "you are an obstacle to me." But on a deeper level it invites Peter to abandon his human way of thinking and get behind Jesus in the sense of following after or behind him, as confirmed when Jesus invites all of his disciples to "come after (or behind) me."

Jesus' invitation to Peter and the disciples is also an invitation to us. If we wish to come after Jesus we must deny our selfishness--including our human way of thinking, take up our "cross"--whatever suffering comes our way analogous to the suffering of Jesus on the cross, and follow Jesus. Paradoxically, if we wish to selfishly save our life, we will actually lose it, but if we lose our life for the sake of Jesus, that is, selflessly spend our lives in service of others like Jesus, we will find

and experience true life both now and in the future when Jesus comes again as the Son of Man.