

## You are God's Microphone

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C – 3 February 2019**

**Readings:** Jer 1:4-5,17-19; 1 Cor 12:31–13:1-13.; Lk 4:21-30

*“I appointed you a prophet to the nations.... Gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything I command you” (Jer 1:5,17)*

### Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. The first and the third readings clearly indicate the roles and risks of prophets, on the one hand, and God's assurance of protection, on the other. Jeremiah (circa 600-550 BC) is certainly among the more popular prophets, whose life is known to us. One often hears verses of the first chapter of the Book of Jeremiah at ordinations, jubilees or anniversaries of priests and religious. Jeremiah's poignant protest: “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy” (v.6) is not included in today's passage, but fades into insignificance before the overwhelming voice of God's assurance: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Appointed and anointed, Jeremiah is sent by God not only to the Israelites but to the so-called ‘Gentiles’ signified by the commission to prophesize “to the nations”. Moreover, he is to leave no segment of society unaddressed; for he must be ‘God's microphone’, so to say, announcing and denouncing “against the whole land – against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land” (v.18).
2. Jeremiah's life and mission were full of trials, tribulations and tortures. He bore insults, scorn, rejection, abuse, contempt and threats. Moreover, he was beaten up and put into stocks (20:1-2); given a death sentence (26:11); lowered into a cistern full of mud (38:6); was called a liar (43:2) and his scroll was burnt by the king (36:20-26). Torn between his faith in God and fidelity to his God-given prophetic mission, on the one hand, and the natural human fear of being harassed and hounded, on the other, his plea to God (20:7-10) to deliver him is heartrending. From the human point of view, gauging from his rejection by kings, false prophets, priests and people alike, Jeremiah seems to be a failure. Nonetheless, in God's eyes, he is a success. God's promise: “They [enemies] shall not prevail against you, for I am with you” is ultimately Jeremiah's sole consolation.
3. The rejection faced by Jeremiah is repeatedly faced by Jesus. The gospel passage reiterates the point that a prophet's message can be a source of great disbelief, discord and division. It's said: ‘Familiarity breeds contempt’. Reports of Jesus' wonders worked at Capernaum—some 40 miles away from his hometown, Nazareth—have reached his disbelieving neighbours who, like us, are swayed by prejudices and poohpoo his works. The divide between the group at Nazareth is clear. There are those “who spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (v.22) and there are the others “who were filled with rage ... got up, drove him out of town, and led him to the brow of the hill ... to hurl him off the cliff” (vv.28-29). Interestingly, they were asking for a miracle to believe in him; and he provided one before their very eyes: “he passed through the midst of them and went on his way”! His ‘hour’ had not yet arrived.

**Possible Link of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading:** In the readings of the past two Sundays, Paul has been stressing two points: (a) All Christians are members of the Body of Christ and must be in communion with one another for its smooth functioning; and, (b) Each member is given unique charisms, which are very different from person to person. Sandwiched between 1 Cor 12, which speaks of the hierarchical and charismatic gifts of the Spirit, and, 1 Cor 14:1 where Paul writes, “Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy” we have the well-known and much-loved 1 Cor 13, which speaks of love as the “greatest of all”. This means that in announcing and denouncing, too, every prophet and prophetess must be animated by love.

Today’s **Psalm (71)** has the imagery of “lips” with the response: “My lips will tell of your help.” This can be connected to the overall theme of all of us being God’s mouth and God’s microphone. Indeed, God tells Jeremiah (15:19): “You shall serve as my mouth!”

### **Three Texts from Catholic Tradition:**

1. St John de Britto (1647-1693), prophet-martyr in India whose feast falls on Monday, February 4: “I await death and I await it with patience. It has always been the object of my prayers. It forms today the most precious reward of my labours and my sufferings.”
2. St Oscar Romero (1917-1918): “God’s best microphone is Christ, and Christ’s best microphone is the Church. The Church is all of you. You are a true microphone of God.”
3. Pope Francis (to religious): “Prophets know God and know the wo/men who are their brethren. They are able to discern and denounce the evil of sin and injustice. Because they are free, they are bound to no one but God, and they have no interest other than God. Prophets take the side of the poor and powerless, for they know that God is on their side.”

### **Contextual Concern:**

Jesuit Father Stan Swamy (81 years) is a prophet who works for the rights of exploited Adivasis in Jharkhand. He wrote an open letter to the nation on Republic Day: “I [Stan Swamy] am one of the ‘suspects’ [of instigating the masses]. I was also raided on 28 August 2018, even after more than four months Pune police have not made any charges. and when I appealed to Bombay HC [No.4741 of 2018] to quash the FIR against me my petition was rejected. Instead it authorized Pune police to continue its investigation on me, without prescribing any time frame, to see if I have committed any offence under UAPA and if needed take strong legal action ....” True prophets, priests and pastors will face grave difficulties, imprisonment and false accusations. Am I and Are We aware of being ‘God’s microphone’?

**In Lighter Vein:** A wise physician once said: “I’ve been practising medicine for 30 years and I’ve been prescribing many things. But, in the long run I’ve realized that for most of what ails human beings, the best medicine is ‘love’. Unimpressed, a patient inquired: “Doctor, what if this medicine does *not* work?” The doctor replied nonplussed: “Double the dose!”

One finds ‘love’ splashed everywhere: in advertisements, films, TV, internet. We also use phrases like ‘making love’ or ‘falling in love’. Love is no empty emotion that can be ‘made’. Moreover, every ‘falling in love’ must lead to ‘rising in love’ since true love dies, but only to rise again. Let’s remember that the “greatest is love” and let’s pray for the strength to be God’s microphone.

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