

3. Jeremiah: A Prophet Wrestles with God

Question to begin

- When have you been in a job or other situation where you were caught between people with conflicting expectations?

The Reading: Jeremiah 12:1-5; 15:15-20; 17:14-18; 20:7-9

Jeremiah Complains to God (Jer 12:1-3)

¹ You will be in the right, O LORD,
 when I lay charges against you;
 but let me put my case to you.
 Why does the way of the guilty prosper?
 Why do all who are treacherous thrive?
² You plant them, and they take root;
 they grow and bring forth fruit;
 you are near in their mouths
 yet far from their hearts.
³ But you, O LORD, know me;
 You see me and test me—my heart is with you.
 Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter,
 and set them apart for the day of slaughter....

God Replies to Jeremiah (Jer 12:5)

⁵ If you have raced with foot-runners and they have wearied you,
 how will you compete with horses?
 and if in a safe land you fall down,
 how will you fare in the thickets of the Jordan?

Another Prayer and Response (Jer 15:15-20)

¹⁵ O LORD, you know;
 remember me and visit me,
 and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors.
 In your forbearance do not take me away;
 know that on your account I suffer insult.
¹⁶ Your words were found, and I ate them,
 and your words became to me a joy
 and the delight of my heart;

for I am called by your name,
 O LORD, God of hosts.
¹⁷ I did not sit in the company of merry-makers,
 nor did I rejoice;
 under the weight of your hand I sat alone,
 for you had filled me with indignation.
¹⁸ Why is my pain unceasing,
 my wound incurable,
 refusing to be healed?
 Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook,
 like waters that fail.

¹⁹ Therefore, thus says the LORD:
 If you turn back, I will take you back,
 and you shall stand before me.
 If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless,
 you shall serve as my mouth....
²⁰ and I will make you to this people
 a fortified wall of bronze;
 they will fight against you,
 but they shall not prevail over you,
 for I am with you
 to save you and deliver you,
 says the LORD.

A Third Prayer: Jeremiah Prays for Vindication (Jer 17:14-18)

¹⁴ Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed;
 save me, and I shall be saved;
 for you are my praise.
¹⁵ See how they say to me,
 ‘Where is the word of the LORD?
 Let it come!’
¹⁶ But I have not run away from being a shepherd in your service,
 nor have I desired the fatal day....
¹⁸ Let my persecutors be shamed,
 but do not let me be shamed....
 bring on them the day of disaster;
 destroy them with double destruction!

A Fourth Prayer (Jer 20:7-9)

⁷ O LORD, you have enticed me,
 and I was enticed;
 you have overpowered me,
 and you have prevailed.
 I have become a laughing-stock all day long;
 everyone mocks me.

⁸ For whenever I speak, I must cry out,
 I must shout, 'Violence and destruction!'
 For the word of the LORD has become for me
 a reproach and derision all day long.

⁹ If I say, 'I will not mention him,
 or speak any more in his name',
 then within me there is something like a burning fire
 shut up in my bones;
 I am weary with holding it in,
 and I cannot.

First Impression

Was there anything that surprised, impressed, delighted or challenged you in these readings?

Questions for Reflection

- Since Jeremiah recognises that God will be in the right (12:1), why does he nevertheless express his accusations against God?
- Jeremiah declares that he did what God wanted but things didn't turn out as he had hoped (15:15-18). Have you ever had this experience? Did you pray about it? How do you look at this situation now?
- Identify Jeremiah's expressions of anger at his enemies and his calls to God to bring retribution on them. Compare his prayers with Jesus' words in Matthew 5:38-42 and Luke 6:27-36. What place do Jeremiah's kinds of appeals have in Christian prayer?
- In Hannah's and David's prayers it was fairly clear what they wanted God to do for them. How clearly does Jeremiah express his appeals to God? What exactly does Jeremiah want God to do?

- Is it good to be honest, even blunt, with God? How does being frank and straightforward go together with reverence and obedience to God?
- How can a person resist a tendency to give God the silent treatment when things are going badly?
- When have you tried to run from something you thought God was calling you to do? How did your experience compare with Jeremiah's? What did you learn?
- Think of a time when carrying out your responsibilities and fulfilling your role of service to other people has been difficult. How did you communicate with God about your struggles? What sort of response from God did you seem to receive? What did this experience teach you? How can you apply what you learned to your life today? How would you compare your experience to Jeremiah's? What can you learn for your own prayer from his struggles with God?

Closing Prayer

Re-read aloud one or two of the four excerpts from Jeremiah's prayers in this session. Take some time to reflect in silence on your present spiritual struggles (struggles against temptation, difficulties in carrying out your responsibilities to others, disappointments, etc.).

Then read aloud the following passage from the Letter to the Ephesians (1:3-23)

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Paul's Prayer

15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

End by praying an *Our Father* as an expression of trust in God.