

Lord, you lift us up when we fall!

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Psalm 63:2-6, 8-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

In the first reading Jeremiah complains to the Lord in that he is an object of laughter, and speaking God's words only brings derision and reproach. In discouragement he tries to hold in his preaching but cannot do so because it burns within him.

The Psalmist is in a continuous search for God and he is lifeless, like a parched land without water, when he feels separated from the Lord. Lifting up his hands he calls to God. He will continue his praise and glorification because he sees God's right hand as upholding him and is joyful in receiving kindness.

In the second reading Paul urges the Romans to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice in their spiritual worship. (See the article "Our Bodies as Sacrifice" under Spiritual Themes at <http://melkplace.com>). No one is to conform themselves to the popular culture of the times but rather be transformed by the renewal of their minds in Jesus and so discern the will of God in their lives and do what is good, pleasing, and perfect.

In the Gospel Jesus explains to the disciples that he must suffer persecution from the elders. Peter takes Jesus aside and tries to talk him out of it, but in response Jesus strongly reprimands Peter indicating that he does not understand the thinking of God. "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me," is the response given to the disciples.

The Father upholds each of us,
The Son offers us renewal of mind,
The Holy Spirit leads us to what is good, pleasing, and perfect.

It is hard to imagine that a holy prophet such as Jeremiah could feel so dejected doing God's work, but oftentimes the culture of our times will reject the advice of the good and holy person. The psalmist, in contrast to the ways of culture, looks at God's kindness as a greater good than life. Paul tells us it is important to seek a renewal of mind that brings discernment of what is good and what is evil in our society. According to the Gospel, a renewal of mind is a certain outcome if we only carry our own crosses, something we can readily do with Jesus' assistance. A holy man (Thomas of Kempis), once wrote, "If you carry your cross willingly, it will carry you; if you carry it unwillingly, you make it a greater burden; if you discard it, without doubt you will find another, and perhaps heavier." In cultural lingo it is equivalent to saying one is jumping out of the frying pan into the fire!



Jesus makes an earnest endeavor to clarify to the minds of the Twelve a most perplexing announcement of his impending suffering. They have come to think of him as the Messianic Son of Man so this concept of suffering is hard for them to accept and Peter questions it but is intensely rebuked by Jesus. This whole idea is a suggestion of Jesus' temptations in the desert by Satan and if he listens to Peter's suggestion he might gain much in terms of material things by going along the easy way, but what would become of the mission he was sent to accomplish by the Father? And where would we be without the crucifixion and resurrection?