**FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**

**30th January 2022**

**First Reading Jeremiah 1:4-5 & 17-19**

Jeremiah is better known to us as a real person than any of the other prophets, for his book contains many passages of personal confession and autobiography. He makes a lonely, tragic figure whose mission seemed to have failed utterly. Yet, that 'failure' was counted his triumph as later ages were to recognize. Our reading is an excerpt from his call and commission.

Jeremiah came from Anathoth, a village four miles north-east of Jerusalem. His father Hilkiah was a priest. His prophetic call came in 626 B.C. (Jeremiah 1:2) while he was still quite a young man, and his mission stretched from King Josiah (640-609) to King Zedekiah (597-587) and through the tragic years that ended with the nation’s destruction.

This is most ironic because Jeremiah’s mission was not merely to Israel but also to "the nations" who had destroyed Israel. From the time of Abraham (circa. 1800 B.C.) Israel always had the only living God in the world. Even his name, YHWH, meant ‘to be’ implying ‘existence’ But they had not taken on board the fact that if that is so, then every other nation in the world had the same claim on him as Israel whatever names they used.

It took the exile and slavery to bring it home, and YHWH’s address to Jeremiah appoints him as ‘prophet to the nations’ So, the passage was chosen to complement Jesus’ observations about the Isaiah passage which he read out during the Synagogue service.

**Responsorial Psalm: 70:1--6, 15 & 17**

This psalm is an individual lament, sung by an aged person in adversity. The afflicted one flees to God and prays for deliverance (first and second stanzas), and concludes with a vow to praise God henceforth (presumably in thanksgiving for delivery from sickness).

This hymn would be suitable for Christian devotion at any time, for the Christian's fundamental sickness is sin, and the delivery is forgiveness through the atoning work of Christ. However, the reason for its choice today seems to be that Jeremiah frequently fled to God for refuge in face of the hostility of the kings, princes, priests, and people of Judah (first reading).

**Second Reading 1 Corinthians 12:31 - 13:13**

This passage, one of the most highly regarded of all Paul’s writings appears to have been carefully composed. To use it as a reading during a marriage ceremony as frequently happens is to misunderstand it for it is not the love within a marriage which is celebrated here, but the love which unites members of a Church.

There were four Greek NT words which may be translated by ‘love’. Eros is sexual love within a marriage. Filia is the common interest that binds together any social group against adversity, such as prisoners, soldiers, neighbours, a family or a football team. It is exclusive, it was the spirit of The Blitz and does not tolerate outsiders. Then, there is Storge, which is nostalgia or love of one’s teddy-bear, a home-sickness or a wistfulness. (Storge does not appear in the New Testament.) But the word Paul uses in our reading is ‘agape’ which is the single-minded love one has for someone else to indifference for oneself. This emotion was well known to the Greeks, but what was new was that Christ said that the ‘someone-else’ could be one’s worst enemy.

The Corinthians' question to Paul had been: which is the higher gift? More specifically, it seems to have been whether prophecy or glossolalia (making involuntarily ecstatic noises) is the higher gift. Paul is not content to settle the matter on this level, to set off one against the other. There is 'the still more excellent way' (12:31) of agape, in the light of which all other gifts may be measured.

Gong and cymbal by themselves have no melody and simply make noise. So, too, glossolalia, without love, is valueless. The sacrifice of one's goods, the sacrifice even of one's life, may be motivated by factors other than love. They could be a gauntlet flung down, a fierce gesture of independence. Paul makes the uncompromising and frightening statement that, without love, even one’s own life is worthless.

**Gospel Luke 4;21-30**

This is a continuation of last Sunday's reading, and gives the reaction of the inhabitants of his home village to what Jesus said in the synagogue. Jesus had returned home after establishing a reputation in the district. We must remember that most ordinary people seldom left their village or travelled far. There was only one spring in the village for daily water. It would have been a meeting point like that at the school gate and everyone would have known everyone else. (The woman in Samaria (John 4;7) seems to have gone at mid-day to avoid meeting others) There was nothing to make the carpenter’s family different to any other.

So their initial reaction is wonder and puzzlement: they think well of Jesus whom they think they know. They are lost in admiration at his gracious words. Nazareth had no famous sons and they were at last on the map, - but how can he, a humble son of an ordinary family, really apply to himself the words of Isaiah and put himself forward as such an important person?

The text says, “We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here” (This is what film critics call a ‘continuity error’) The mention of Capernaum must have come from a later visit as there have been no miracles there at this stage in Luke’s story. In its present situation v. 23 refers to a demand that Jesus should back his claim by miracles and v. 24 explains why he cannot do this: he shares the fate of every prophet - rejection by his own people.

Jesus, like some great prophetic predecessors, will turn to the Gentiles who, by implication, will receive him. (There was always a minority tradition of universalism in Judaism, see, especially the story of Jonah. The Gentile Luke makes the most of this. (see Acts of the Apostles 13:46 & 50))

The people rise in fury (vv. 28-30) when they understand him to mean that the benefits they have rejected will be offered to the Gentiles. Drawing attention to the legends of Elijah and Elisha only comes in Luke’s Gospel and the language also displays his distinctive vocabulary and style. The interest in turning to the Gentiles after the rejection by Israel is also a characteristic Lucan theme. The point he makes is that Zarephath and Syria were hostile to Israel and any conciliation would have been unacceptable to Jews. The story closes with a hostile attempt on Jesus' life and his escape into the crowd illustrates how unexceptional his appearance must have been.

The ultimate fate of Jesus at the hands of his own people is foreshadowed early on, but his hour is not yet come (see 9:51; John 7:30, 45; 8:59). According to Deuteronomy 13:1-5, a false prophet was to be put to death. The citizens of Nazareth thought they had their man and were ready to carry out that threat once made against Jeremiah (Jeremiah 11:12). But the Father has arranged the timetable for Jesus, and the time will come when there will be no escape (see Luke 20:15; 23:33); for Jesus carefully timed the ultimate political gaffe of provoking those of his people who wielded effective power.

The miraculous escape from the hostile crowd is paralleled in John 10:39, so something like it must have been based on a historical incident. It seems, therefore, that Luke has a special source containing a second version of the Nazareth episode apart from Mark's.

In the remainder of the Gospel. Luke will repeatedly stress the point, first made here, that because of Israel's rejection of the Messiah, the gospel goes forth to the Gentile world.