



a Kendall Hunt Company

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Jeremiah 20:7-9

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

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

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Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word In Liturgy

The call of Jeremiah to be a prophet which is found at the beginning of his book (cf. 1:1ff.) describes both his initial reluctance and the Lord's insistence that he accept the call, as well as a firm reassurance of divine protection. However, we know a great many details about the life and times of the prophet which would seem to contradict the Lord's promise of protection. In the face of Jeremiah's condemnation of the leaders and the people alike for their infidelities to the covenant, he was met with resistance, rejection, and outright persecution. He was beaten and thrown into a sewer to die, an outcast from his own family

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and friends. In today's remarkable text from the autobiographical writings known as his "Confessions," we hear expressed the intense anguish that his sufferings have caused him. Jeremiah challenges God in bold language one might use toward a betrayer, and he admits he has even tried not to utter his message of doom to Jerusalem. But he has been unable to suppress the Word of God; keeping it in was like trying to shut up a fire burning in his bones ("I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it"). Christian tradition has long recognized in Jeremiah a figure for the sufferings of Christ and for the disciples of Christ. The inevitability of the suffering which awaits a true prophet or disciple of the Lord has found no more eloquent personification than Jeremiah.

We noted last week the pivotal importance which Peter's profession of faith played in the structure of Matthew's gospel. Today's text is linked closely to that profession and, in fact, completes what Matthew wishes to say here about discipleship. For his community, already facing persecution as the cost of discipleship, Matthew wanted to be perfectly clear that what happened to Jesus on the cross and what was befalling more and more of Jesus' followers was not a random aberration. Jesus "must" go to Jerusalem to "suffer greatly" (v. 21); and so, too, if anyone wishes to be Jesus' disciple, "he must deny his very self, take up his cross, and begin to follow" in the footsteps of the Master (v. 24). For any of the members of his community who might waver at the thought of facing one of Rome's imperial tribunals, Matthew reminds his audience of the final judgment, when the Son of Man will come to repay each "according to his conduct" (v. 27).

Catholic Doctrine

The Cross in the Life of the Disciple

The disciple of Jesus follows his example and accepts a share in the cross. The cross, that ancient and cruel Roman method of humiliation, torture, and death is for the Christian also a sign of victory and triumph. Disciples choose, in faith, to see in the way of the cross the path to resurrection and new life. As this Sunday's gospel passage clarifies, disciples of Jesus are invited to participate in the event of the cross, to share in the suffering of Christ who has united himself to every human being not only through his incarnation but through his suffering, death, and resurrection (CCC 618).



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With an assassination attempt that put him in the hospital and with later surgery due to a fall, John Paul II is no stranger to the phenomenon of human suffering. Like many Christians, he chooses to see in that suffering our share in the cross of Jesus Christ. He has written that all human suffering has the potential to be transformed with the passion of Christ. Indeed, the pope wrote in an apostolic letter that in bringing about the redemption through suffering, Christ has raised human suffering to the level of the redemption (*Salvifici doloris*, 11 February 1984, 19).

Every believer can in suffering become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ. The Church understands that there is a virtue in consciously uniting one's own suffering to the passion of Jesus. The paschal mystery consists of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. The first portion of that mystery centers in the image of Christ crucified, that is, it focuses on the image of the cross. John Paul II writes, "[Jesus] dies nailed to a cross. But if at the same time in this weakness there is accomplished his lifting up, confirmed by the power of the resurrection, then this means that the weakness of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's cross" (SD 23). The executioner's instrument has become the throne upon which Jesus is lifted up in glory (John 12:27-32). In the paschal mystery of Christ, we believe that God has therefore taken death upon the cross and turned it into our salvation (CCC 622).

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The holy cross of Jesus, which is at once a horror and an honor, enables John Paul II to create a new term: the gospel of suffering. He movingly writes about Jesus who transforms our suffering and in that change the hurting person is invited to a place close to Jesus himself. "It is He—as the interior Master and Guide—who reveals to the suffering brother and sister this wonderful interchange, situated at the very heart of the mystery of Redemption. Suffering is, in itself, an experience of evil. But Christ has made suffering the firmest basis of the definitive good. By His suffering on the cross, Christ reached the very roots of evil, of sin and death. He conquered the author of evil, Satan, and his permanent rebellion against the Creator. To the suffering brother and sister, Christ discloses and gradually reveals the horizons of the kingdom of God: the horizons of a world converted to the Creator, of a world free from sin, a world being built on the saving power of love" (SD 26).

Catholics believe that through the very heart of the experience of suffering and the cross we are led into the kingdom of God, for suffering cannot be transformed and changed from the outside, but only from within the very depths of a person through the Spirit. Thus, we believe

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that the way in which followers of Jesus pick up their cross and follow the Master is a matter—
of the heart, the interior spirit, and love.

