

Sunday January 30, 2022  
Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time  
**Parishioner Reflection**

*By: Paul Legace*

This week the scripture readings focus on God knowing us well before we were born and a description of love that has stood the test of time. The gospel takes us back to a synagogue in Nazareth where Jesus is rejected by the people who knew him since he was a child. Jesus' declaration that he was the anointed one by God, the Messiah was met by hostility and an attempt to murder him. How will we greet Jesus today present in the mass? Will we have a humble heart and a genuine desire to understand his message for the world? Or will we ignore his message and toss him aside because it runs counter to our culture?

In the first reading Jeremiah speaks of a time before he was born when the Lord (Yahweh) knew him and had predestined him to be a prophet for the nations. The Lord tells Jeremiah to prepare for action and tell the people everything I have commanded you. Jeremiah will be made to withstand the opposition like a fortified city. His opponents will be numerous such as the rulers of Judah, the princes, and priests and even many of the people. The Lord proclaims to Jeremiah to be steadfast in the face of this opposition, don't be afraid for I am with you and I will deliver you. Jeremiah like many prophets before him was hesitant to undertake this noble calling and resisted, fearful that he wouldn't be able to find the right words to speak to the people. Yahweh stretches out his hand and touches Jeremiah's mouth and declares "There! I have put my words into your mouth."

There are times in our lives where we need to speak up and act justly, in essence proclaim our faith to others and not be shy or apologetic. It could be a classmate or colleague at work who is being bullied because of their appearance or cultural differences. Do I have the courage to tell the bullies to leave him alone and respect him and his culture? Many adolescents question why they should attend mass each week. Do I take the time to give a thoughtful response and encourage him/her to attend, despite the cultural practices that disregard weekly church attendance? With prayer and patience Our Lord will help us find the words.

In the second reading St. Paul addresses the Christian community in Corinth. He tells them to strive for the greater gifts. He lays out a path that revolves around love that can be adopted today and for eternity. Love is the most essential ingredient no matter what talents one possesses. St. Paul describes love as patient and kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It doesn't insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all

things. Love never ends. Is it any wonder why many couples choose this scripture reading when they are planning their wedding ceremony?

How can we integrate these beautiful words about love into our lives? That's the key question. We don't just want to hear them; our faith calls us to action. First and foremost one needs to look at our own relationships with others. When a mother or father is patient and helps their son understand that the language he uses reflects back on his character and values, they do this out of love. Swearing is ubiquitous in our culture today, especially cursing the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. A parent needs to be patient, firm but also model appropriate language especially when one is angry or disappointed. Love is kind. Simple tasks to help a neighbour such as cleaning his or her driveway or sidewalk especially if they are elderly. Helping a family when they have experienced a death of a loved one or are experiencing a lengthy illness by providing a meal, sending a note of condolences or dropping by to see how they are coping can be genuine acts of kindness. How many times do we say things out of anger that in time we realize were wrong, inappropriate, or arrogant? Do we apologize for our rashness or arrogance? A healthy relationship can only occur if we are truthful with ourselves and admit our mistakes.

The gospel this week is taken from Luke 4.21-30. The dramatic story that continues from last week's gospel in which Jesus proclaims in the synagogue in Nazareth that the scripture has been fulfilled in their hearing. Jesus had read from the scroll from the Prophet Isaiah exclaiming that the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. The people were astonished with what he had said, many exclaiming that this young man was Joseph's son! They became very angry when Jesus mentioned that no prophet is accepted in his hometown. They drove Jesus out of the synagogue and out of town. The angry crowd took him to the edge of a high cliff from which they meant to hurl him off. Jesus calmly walked through their midst and went on his way. What are we to make of such a violent response to Jesus' message about being anointed by God? His fellow citizens from Nazareth could not get past the fact he was the local carpenter's son. Did they think he was some imposter? Did some feel jealous of his fame amongst the people in the area around the Sea of Galilee? His message of love and mercy for the less fortunate was lost because many couldn't see beyond his local roots. Many simply could not accept him as the one who performed countless miracles, the Saviour and Messiah that he said he was. Rather than accept the truth the crowd became angry and hostile. Their self-importance and pride blinded them from seeing the true Jesus of Nazareth. This imposter should be run out of town, or better yet thrown from a cliff.

How do we respond to Jesus' message? Are we like the crowds who heard Jesus speak in the synagogue? Do we come to mass each week hearing the gospel but not really integrating it into our lives? Does my lifestyle run counter to his message? Is my trust placed in the Lord or in material possessions? Will I take the time to help a stranger whether it is someone who is homeless and on the street by offering some money to assist them? Or is my thought process

more along the lines of, “why can’t she get a job, get off the bottle or take her medication and get off the streets? If I give some money to that street person he’ll just go and get more alcohol and get drunk. He has to help himself first before I help him!” Jesus’ love was never conditional. His unconditional love was given to lepers (the outcasts in his day), beggars, prostitutes, the disabled, unscrupulous tax collectors, and even the rich and many more.

On this 4th Sunday in Ordinary time Jesus is present at the mass, just as he was approximately 2,000 years ago in the synagogue in Nazareth. How will we respond to his message today? Will we ignore it because it makes us uncomfortable or runs counter to our cultural norms? Or will we think about his message, and act upon it as he walks through our midst and continues on? Jesus calls us to become a community that reaches out to all the members of our society regardless of social position, wealth, ethnicity, sexuality and to build a more compassionate and just society.