

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year C: Jer 1:4-5, 17-19; Ps 71; 1Cor 12:31-13:13; Lk 4:21-30
January 30, 2022
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In the first reading, we heard God tell the prophet Jeremiah that He had a plan for his life even before he was created. *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,”* God tells Jeremiah. It’s a revelation to us that God has an appointed plan for our lives. Our lives are not an afterthought for God. He decides in eternity, even before we are created, what good we can do in this life, if we use our freedom to cooperate with Him. For Jeremiah, the vocation was to speak some inconvenient and uncomfortable truths, truths which would cause him to face opposition and experience hardship. But God told him, *“Gird your loins; stand up and tell them all that I command you. Be not crushed on their account, as though I would leave you crushed before them; ... for I am with you to deliver you.”* God was telling Jeremiah that He would give him the strength and sustain him to fulfill his vocation.

In the second reading for this Sunday, we are reminded about how we should fulfill our assigned tasks from God. The reading is from St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, and it contains one of the more popular and well-known passages from Sacred Scripture, a passage that is often read at weddings. It’s about love, and the importance of love as the filter and motive for everything we do. All of our efforts, St. Paul says, should be motivated by love. Our efforts to be wise and our efforts to be generous should be motivated by love. Our efforts to be courageous and our efforts to be honest should be motivated by love. And, above all, our efforts to be faithful and religious should also be motivated by love – love for God and love for others.

For each of us, this life presents a limited opportunity and the challenge to do everything out of love. And love makes all the difference. Real love changes our lives, it purifies our lives. If love is genuine and sincere, it purifies our motives and rules out vices. *“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”* Genuine love rules out impatience and jealousy; it rules out arrogance and rudeness, it rules out selfishness and anger and resentment. It helps us to endure and persevere in whatever tasks we have been assigned by God.

If we strive to do everything out of love, we might still find ourselves asking if love is our true motive. Purification of motive can be a tricky business, because we often have mixed motives for our actions. But the more we love, the less selfish we are. Genuine love is *selfless* – it desires and seeks the good of the other person, rather than what is good for ourselves. That’s how we know if we really love as we should. If we’re wondering if our actions are motivated by love, we can ask ourselves if we calculate what we think is good for ourselves, or if we desire and seek what is good for others.

The Gospel tells us how Christ faced opposition, even from those most familiar with Him in His home town of Nazareth. His vocation, like that of Jeremiah, required Him to voice some inconvenient and uncomfortable truths, truths that the people needed to hear. And this brought Him face to face with anger and resentment and even violence. But Christ faced and overcame all of this opposition with a deep and abiding love – love for God the Father who sent Him into the world, and love for all of us whom He came to save. No matter what others threw at Christ, He always responded with love. He loved even those who were trying to kill Him in His home town of Nazareth.

This is the goal for us who strive to be like Christ – to fulfill our vocations with love. Whatever God has assigned us to do, whether it’s raising children, or caring for elderly parents, whether it’s working in law enforcement or working to reform the Church – whatever our vocation from God, God asks us to do it out of love – to purify our motives of jealousy and arrogance and selfishness. The same task, such as building a house, can be accomplished either out of pride and greed and jealousy, or out of love, and the same house which results from hard work and effort means much more to God, if it was built with love.

So, this is the goal for us: to fulfill the vocation that God assigned to us even before He created us, and to do it with love, which seeks the good for God and others, rather than for ourselves. And if we struggle to sustain love as our motive, we can know that when God sees a soul using its freedom to cooperate with Him, He rushes to provide the strength that is needed. This is God’s promise to us, if we choose to cooperate with Him.