

4TH SUNDAY ORD. (C) BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, I KNEW YOU

In the scriptures, God made it clear through the prophets that He knew and knows everybody even before we came into this world, and He will never forget us. Again, He tells us that each and every one is important before Him, and each has something to offer to the society and the Church.

One example is what we heard in the first reading, when Jeremiah was called to be a prophet. He was told that before his mother gave birth to him, he had been consecrated as a prophet. When the Israelites complained that the Lord had forsaken them, God made reference to a child in the womb: “can a woman forget the infant at her breast or a mother the child of her womb? But should even these forget, I shall never forget you,” (Isa.49:14-15). The Psalmist also said: “You created my inmost self, knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, so wonderfully you made me; wonderful are your works,” (Ps.139:13-14).

Last week, we heard that some have been given the gift to be apostles, others prophets, teachers, and mighty deeds, among others. Today we hear about the call of Jeremiah as a prophet, and Jesus beginning His ministry as a prophet and priest. He announced that the good news was also for the pagans. Both of them were faced with opposition because of who they were and the message they delivered.

Each and every one was known by God before he or she was born, and each has been given a gift by which he or she may serve God. We may feel unworthy to take certain positions considering our background and place of origin. Jeremiah told God that he was a child, and Isaiah also said that he was a sinner living among sinners; (Isa.6:5). St. Paul told Timothy: “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in your speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity,” (1Tim.4:12). Though they felt unworthy, God used them to execute His plans.

We are not able to live the true Christian life, because we fear rejection and persecution. We fear the world and its authority because they seem to be more powerful than we are. We are afraid to make the truth come out. Jeremiah was in serious trouble for preaching the truth. St. Paul tells us that the one who has love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all

things, endures all things”. Are we sure that we are Christians filled with love?

Another temptation we face is the fact that we focus on what we can do to the extent that we forget about the love we have to show. We tend to despise others and look down upon them. St. Paul tells us that what we have to strive for is the higher gifts - faith, hope, and love. According to him what we cherish on earth are all imperfect; “For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away”.

The Jews were angry with Jesus because He told them about what God did for the Gentiles, the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. The Jews considered them unclean or unworthy to receive God’s grace, but they were also known by God before they were born, and had the opportunity to experience salvation. The Jews behaved contrary to what the second reading is saying. They were jealous and boastful, arrogant and rude. They insisted on their own interest, were quick-tempered and resentful.

Are we filled with love, or are we also caught up in the same way as the people who were listening to Jesus in the synagogue? If God knew me before I was born and He shows me love, then every one born and those in the womb are known and loved by God, and we should love them. Taking

Jeremiah’s case that before he was born, God had consecrated him to be a prophet, then we have been disposing of doctors, priests, prophets, lawyers, and many people who might have helped save many situations. My parents did not know I would be a priest. Your parents did not know you would be a doctor or nurse or lawyer or engineer; it was only God who knew why He created you.

Jeremiah was in serious trouble for speaking the truth; Jesus was expelled from the synagogue for making it clear that pagans too have a share in God’s salvation. In the same way we shall be persecuted if we stand by the truth. But we should not forget that suffering is a mark of a true Christian. If we do everything with love we will never fail, because God is love.