

20TH SUNDAY ORD. (C)
LET US RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE THE RACE THAT IS SET
BEFORE US

St. Paul most often described the Christian life as a race or a fight. This is found in his letters to some of the believers; (1Cor.9:25-27; 1Tim.6:12; 2Tim.4:7); and this is also what we heard in the second reading.

He described it that way because he realized that both preaching and living according to the word of God is not easy; it is like an athlete who has to train every day in order to win. But many have made it to the end, and one of them was Jeremiah. He was put into the cistern because he preached the word of God to the people, but his own people were offended by his message.

Jesus in the gospel talks about His impending suffering. He linked His baptism with His death. This would be preceded by setting fire on earth, and it is a spiritual fire to purify the hearts of men. He told them that some will accept Him and His word and become His disciples, (Jn. 1:11-12); others will reject Him, as Jeremiah was rejected. This will bring division even among blood relations.

The word of God is described as a very sharp object; sharper than a two edged sword: "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart," (Heb.4:12). St. Paul told Timothy also: "All scripture is inspired by God and useful for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be upright. This is how someone who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work," (2Tim.3:16).

To be able to run the race, we have to accept the word of God, and then "fixed our eyes on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of our faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before Him He endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken His seat at the right of the throne of God". As God's people and disciples of Jesus, we need courage and determination. We are faced with many trials but St. Paul said in the second reading "we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses", who fought the good fight and finished the race, by 'washing their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'; (Rev.7:14). On our part, "in our struggle against sin we have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood".

Through our baptism, we have died with Christ and have been purified by the fire of the Spirit. But His word that helps us to be on the right path has been rejected. This has brought confusion and division even in the Church, and in families.

From the lives of Jeremiah, Jesus, and Paul, to live by God's word has not been, and will not be easy, but God will rescue the one who tries to abide by it. Jeremiah was rescued by a foreigner, Ebed-melech, the Cushite. The Psalmist also gives us the assurance that the Lord will come to our rescue, as he said: "I have waited, waited for the Lord, and He stooped toward me. The Lord heard my cry. He drew me from the deadly pit, out of the mud of the swamp. He set my feet on a rock; made my footsteps firm".

Where are the struggles and trials coming from? Are they from your parents, or wife, or husband, or children, or friends, or co-workers? How can you persevere? St. Peter advised the early Christians: "Be on the alert! Wake up! Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, prowls around looking for someone to devour. Stand up to him, firm in your faith, and remember that your fellow Christians in this world are going through the same kind of suffering. After your brief suffering, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, establish, and strengthen you on a firm foundation," (1Pet.5:8-10).