

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7**

<sup>29:1</sup> These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

<sup>29:4</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup> Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

**Commentary**

From Chapter 1, we know that Jeremiah was either born or began his ministry in 627 BC. During his life, Babylonia succeeded Assyria as the dominant power in the Middle East. When Babylon captured Jerusalem in 587, Jeremiah emigrated to Egypt. God called him to be a prophet to Judah and surrounding nations, amid these political and religious convulsions.

Our reading is part of a letter Jeremiah wrote from Jerusalem to the leaders of the exiles in Babylon, deported when Babylon occupied Judah for the first time (597 BC). To people who believed that only in Israel could God be worshipped, the letter would be shocking and revolutionary: God can be worshipped outside the holy land! Having sent people “into exile” (v. 4), he now commands them, through Jeremiah, to establish permanent homes in Babylon (v. 5), to have large families (“multiply there”, v. 6), and even to pray for the welfare of the Babylonian state (v. 7).

**Reflection**

We may sometimes feel, as Christians, like aliens, “strangers in a strange land,” people who know that this earth is not our true home. And yet, God never wants us to be “so heavenly-minded that we’re no earthly good!” With the people of Israel in exile, we are called to pray for

the “welfare of the city where (God has) sent you into exile.” Salvation begins in the here-and-now.

## **2 Timothy 2:8-15**

<sup>2:8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David--that is my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. <sup>11</sup> The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; <sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself. <sup>14</sup> Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. <sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

### **Commentary**

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus, together known as the *Pastoral Epistles*, are markedly different in vocabulary and literary style from epistles we know to be Paul's. 2 Timothy is the most personal of the *Pastorals*: most of it is directed specifically to Timothy. From the Book of Acts, we know that Timothy was from Lystra in Asia Minor, and was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother who had become a Christian. He accompanied Paul on his travels.

Timothy, we read last week, lacks the courage to hand on the good news, perhaps because he leads a Christian community subject to ostracism or persecution. Using three illustrations (“soldier”, v. 3; “athlete”, v. 5; “farmer”, v. 6), the writer of this letter, using Paul’s name, has told Timothy that being a Christian requires single-mindedness, self-denial and intense effort.

Now he is advised to recall what Paul taught: Christ, restored to God, is the kingly Messiah (“descendant of David”, v. 8) long expected. Paul continues to preach this despite “hardship” (v. 9) and imprisonment. Even so, the good news is available to all and continues to spread (“not chained”). Paul is the great example of enduring for those who are already Christian and for those who will come to faith (“the elect”, v. 10), enabling them to enjoy Christ’s promise of eternal life.

Vv. 11-13 are rhythmical, so scholars believe they are from an early Christian hymn. If we share in Christ, in his death for sin in the world, we too will have eternal life (v. 11). If we do not give up, we will share in the Kingdom with him (v. 12a), but if we “deny him” (perhaps in times of trial or suffering) he will refuse to recognize us when he judges people – when he comes again (“he will also deny us”). In spite of our desertion, his promise is always there, for he is unchangeable (“cannot deny himself”, v. 13). V. 14 begins a section on how Timothy should minister in the presence of false teachers – who change or augment the body of faith handed down. These people *wrangle over words*, causing some to leave the community. Present

yourself, Timothy, as a true and honorable teacher forging ahead in telling the faith as it is! (v. 15).

## **Reflection**

The Second Letter to Timothy was written to a small Christian community enduring persecution and oppression. Timothy, as the fledgling community's pastor, was understandably discouraged, and this pastoral epistle was a sort of "pep talk" to prop up his flagging spirits. If we Western Christians, who've never experienced religious persecution, sometimes find our own spirits failing, imagine what it must be like to be a Christian in the Middle East today! Take time now to pray for Christians persecuted for their faith – all around the world – and give thanks for your religious liberty.

## **Luke 17:11-19**

<sup>17:11</sup> On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, <sup>13</sup> they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" <sup>14</sup> When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. <sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. <sup>16</sup> He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" <sup>18</sup> Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

## **Commentary**

Three gospels in the New Testament offer similar portraits of the life of Jesus; Luke is the third of them. Its author, traditionally Luke the physician who accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys, emphasizes God's love for the poor, the disadvantaged, minorities, outcasts, sinners and lepers. Women play a more prominent part than in the other gospels. Luke never uses Semitic words; this is one argument for thinking that he wrote primarily for Gentiles.

Jesus is on the final leg of his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. He told his disciples how important genuine faith is. Lepers were outcasts from society; people considered them ritually unclean, believed the disease to be infectious by touch, and thought they were possessed by evil spirits. All ten acknowledge Jesus as who he is, "Master" (v. 13): they have faith. To be restored to society, a leper needed certification from "the priests" (v. 14) that he was free of the disease. While all ten acknowledge Jesus as God, only one, a "Samaritan" (v. 16), a "foreigner" (v. 18), gives thanks to him (v. 16). All ten are healed of leprosy but only one is wholly "made ... well" (v. 19) – for the Greek word bears with it the idea of rescue from impending destruction or from superior powers. One whom Jews despised has been saved and is grateful. (See 7:27 for cleansing of lepers being a sign of the coming of the Kingdom.)

## Reflection

Only the despised Samaritan – doubly despised, as he is both a Samaritan and a leper – returns to thank Jesus for his healing. Why do you think that was? Did he perhaps have the most to be grateful for?

## Responsive Psalter

from Psalm 66:1-12

- <sup>66:1</sup> Make a joyful noise to God,  
all the earth;  
<sup>2</sup> **sing the glory of his name;  
give to him glorious praise.**
- <sup>3</sup> Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!  
Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.  
<sup>4</sup> **All the earth worships you;  
they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name."**
- <sup>5</sup> Come and see what God has done:  
he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.  
<sup>6</sup> **He turned the sea into dry land;  
they passed through the river on foot.**  
There we rejoiced in him,  
<sup>7</sup> who rules by his might forever,  
**whose eyes keep watch on the nations—  
let the rebellious not exalt themselves.**
- <sup>8</sup> Bless our God, O peoples,  
let the sound of his praise be heard,  
<sup>9</sup> who has kept us among the living,  
and has not let our feet slip.  
<sup>10</sup> **For you, O God, have tested us;  
you have tried us as silver is tried.**
- <sup>11</sup> You brought us into the net;  
you laid burdens on our backs;  
<sup>12</sup> **you let people ride over our heads;  
we went through fire and through water;  
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.**

## Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**