

Readings

Jer 20:7-9

Ps 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

Rom 12:1-2

Mt 16:21-27

Gary N. McCloskey, O.S.A.
St. Thomas of Villanova Monastery
Villanova, Pennsylvania

“I’ve been duped!”

Can you hear Jeremiah, from our first reading, over there in the corner muttering “I’ve been duped,” “I’ve been duped”? One of the reasons we can’t hear him is that our first reading has put him into our imagination. The other reason is that we cannot hear him over all the yelling in our world. Those on the left are yelling at the right, “you’ve been duped.” Those on the right are yelling at the left, “you’ve been duped.” And those who are neither left nor right are yelling at us, “You are all duped.”

But our second reading from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans cautions us: even amid all the noise, “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” We should use this time at Mass and any silence we can find to listen for the will of God. Remember that silent and listen contain the same exact letters. Take time to listen for what Saint Paul calls “what is good and pleasing and perfect.”

When Saint Paul admonishes us, “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,” he knows it will be no easy task. If he lived today, he would know that it is very comforting to live in our separate silos of thought, listening to those

who think just like us. In that way his time and ours are alike. In the Second Pastoral Letter of Timothy we are told, “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (4:3). In our noisy world we are listening to what our “itching ears want to hear.” What is different and what would amaze Saint Paul is our social media, newspaper, and cable tv silos where we are listening with itching ears to so many more voices who agree with what we want to hear. In our different silos the voices are growing to drown out opposing thoughts, sound doctrine, and God’s Will. Sadly, it does not matter what side we take, our itching ears are winning by listening to what we want to hear, rather than what we should hear.

What can we do? The response we shared to our Responsorial Psalm can give us some insight when it tells us “My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.” Rather than relying on itching ears, we should follow the thirst for God we feel in our soul. If we don’t feel that thirst, we need to ask ourselves if we have really stopped listening. Are our desires and our itching ears blocking out God, so we are conforming ourselves to this age? And, as a result, are we not open to being “transformed by the renewal” of our minds, so that we may “discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect?” Paying attention to the thirst for God is tough. Jeremiah in our first reading feels duped because following God’s Will is hard. As he tells us, “The word of the LORD has brought me derision and reproach all the day.”

Yes, listening beyond the noise of our world is tough, but much is at stake. Our Gospel today from Saint Matthew reminds us how tough it will be and what is at stake when he asks us, “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” To gain our

eternal lives, let us follow the Prophet Jeremiah and allow the Word of the Lord to overcome our itching ears and become “like fire burning” in our hearts. Because of all the voices around us we may, like Jeremiah, say that God’s Will is “imprisoned in my bones. I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it” in the face of all those other voices. While following our itching ears may be easy, the path to God’s truth that our readings today are calling us to involve difficulties we need to take on to achieve eternal life.

As souls questing for our eternal prize and thirsting for our Lord, our God, let us imagine:

- Are we being duped by the easy thoughts of false prophets or are we like Jeremiah struggling with the transformation that God wants for us? Let us take a moment to listen over the noise for the Will of God! **(Pause)**
- Are our itching ears conformed to our own wills, or are our thirsting souls leading us to God’s transformation by the renewal of our minds, so that we can “discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect?” Let us take a moment to listen over the noise for the Will of God! **(Pause)**
- Are we asking God for his grace to make the difficult choices to save our eternal lives, rather than “gain the whole world?” Let us take another moment to listen over the noise for the Will of God! **(Pause)**

Let us pray that our thirst for the Will of our loving God will be quenched with His truth and we will take the difficult path and be saved for eternal life.