



Proclaiming the Word

at

St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church

The Lector

Ministry

**Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sunday, August 31st**

**Jeremiah 20:7-9
Romans 12:1-2**

Reflection on Lectoring

There is a difference between collecting and verifying the facts of history and understanding their timeless meaning. This is uniquely true when studying the life of Jesus. You can study the historical details of his life, or you can take the next step and commit to believing that Jesus was God incarnate. You can recognize that truth comes in two flavors - the truth of facts and the truth of faith.

African missionary-doctor Albert Schweitzer understood this when he wrote in his book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, "Jesus means something in our world because a mighty spiritual force streams forth from Him and flows through our time also. This fact can neither be shaken nor confirmed by any historical discovery. It is the solid foundation of Christianity" (p.397). The facts of history can give us perspective. But Jesus' apostles, who had a very first-hand cultural and historical perspective, followed Jesus because they believed - not because they completely understood.

When we encounter the Scriptures today, thousands of years later, we do it through the eyes of faith. When we do, we encounter the kind of truth that is inexhaustible. Like a great work of art or literature, the Scriptures offer us a truth and beauty to which we can return again and again. When done with prayer and reflection our encounter with Scripture is always new, never rote or repetitive, always open to deeper insights and inspiration.

Lectors partake in what must be a profound encounter with the Scriptures. They help make the proclamation of the Scriptures an encounter of faith - the kind of encounter that must always be new and renewing.

As we shall see below in the following reflection on the first reading, proclaiming God's word has nothing in common with an indifferent recitation of facts or the kind of impersonal announcing of the arrivals and departures you might hear at a train station.

First Reading

Holding Nothing Back

Can you imagine anyone at Mass vehemently declaring that God deceived him or her? And saying it out loud so that everyone can hear? That is exactly what will happen this weekend. And it will be the lector who says it.

“You duped me O Lord, and I let myself be duped.”

These words from Scripture are not being said by someone who is pretending, or by someone who is just trying to make an extravagant statement - a statement that he will later suggest was only a colorful attempt to teach some completely noncontroversial or unassailable point about our relationship with God. Jeremiah was really angry. He was really despondent. He was really disgusted. A few verses later in Chapter 20 he says, *“Cursed by the day on which I was born!”*

Today’s reading is taken from a remarkable chapter in which Jeremiah tells his boss Pashhur, the chief officer of the house of the Lord, that he and his friends will die in Babylon because he has *“prophesied lies to them.”* Jeremiah then expresses his frustrations to God when he says, *“You were too strong for me, and you triumphed.”*

This is not the kind of Scripture passage that can be read by the lector as if he or she were announcing arrivals and departures at a train station. There is nothing casual about any of this. Perhaps lectors and those who hear them at Mass should be thankful that the liturgy allows for the expression of real, human emotions.

Second Reading

Then and Now

With this weekend’s reading from Romans, Paul begins a section full of exhortations - exhortations on how to live a life that is pleasing to God and in harmony with others in the community. Unlike today’s preachers, Paul does not have church council documents, papal encyclicals or even a canon of New Testament books to serve as resources. He is offering guiding principles meant to address the current and specific needs of the people who live in early Christian communities.

In today’s second reading, Paul is telling his hearers that they have an individual responsibility to live harmonious lives. The Old Testament law and its sacrificial rituals have been superseded by a way of life modeled on the example of Christ and by the self-sacrifice of each individual believer.

Following the two verses of today’s reading is the well-known passage about mutual interdependence, *“For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another.”* (v.4-5).

This reading provides lectors with an opportunity to help their hearers experience an earlier time in church history when survival as a worshipping community required a powerful commitment to sacrifice for the sake of others. It is a message that still has an immediate and practical application today.