

Read

Jeremiah 20:10-13
Psalm 69:8-10, 14, 17,
33-35

Romans 5:12-15

Matthew 10:26-33



REFLECTION

In the movie *The Mission*, the Jesuit priest Fr. Gabriel is told that he needs to abandon his mission and the people he has been serving because of a treaty between Portugal and Spain. Despite pressure from his superiors and imminent violence at the hands of the military, Gabriel and several of his brother priests refuse to abandon the native people.

This is the call to integrity that Jesus makes in today's Gospel. While most of us are not facing possible martyrdom, we do face choices all the time between suffering some sort of physical or emotional pain and doing what we know to be right. Like Fr. Gabriel, we have to choose between living according to the rules of a world where "might makes right" or living in the truth that we come from Love and are made for Love alone.



QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Is there anything you would lay down your life for? Why is martyrdom such a powerful witness?
- ❖ How do even secret sins affect your relationships with yourself, with God, and with other people?

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 25, 2023

⚡ ACTION

God knows even the number of hairs on your head. What a thought! This week's Gospel also assures us that our lives and actions have eternal significance. God knows all parts of us, the good and the bad, and loves us. This is great news, even if it makes us uncomfortable to think God knows the things we are ashamed of. What secrets would you be ashamed to have come to light? Take this opportunity to bring those secret sins to confession. The grace of the sacrament helps us to be free from the power we allow these things to have over us. Ask Jesus to help you live according to his light!



The Mission
(1986 film)



June 25, 2023

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #94A

Jeremiah 20:10-13

Psalms 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35

Romans 5:12-15

Matthew 10:26-33

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In today's Gospel, Jesus is encouraging the disciples who, having been commissioned in ministry, will certainly face persecution. For teens, having courage in the face of persecution is often connected to withstanding peer pressure. More often, for every one of us, there is daily pressure to compromise some aspect of the commandment to love, particularly when faced with bullying and gossip. It's difficult to resist joining in when it seems that everyone else is mocking, belittling, or criticizing someone. It is even harder to speak up and defend the dignity of the targeted person, especially when there will be social consequences. Yet doing so is a failure to love; it is a sin which destroys the soul. We matter too much to God to give in to this kind of fear.

Q FOCUS: *Do not fear the social persecution that accompanies Christ-like love.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

June 29 is the solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, two pillars of the Church. Peter is recognized as the first pope, the rock upon whom Jesus built the Church, and to whom Jesus gave the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19). Through Paul's missionary journeys and letters to budding Christian communities, the Church spread throughout the world. As much as we celebrate their lives of service and impact on the Church, the New Testament reminds us that these weren't perfect men. Peter denied knowing

Christ, and Paul fervently persecuted Christians. Both got many things wrong, but neither let their mistakes define them. Instead, both surrendered to the mercy and mission of Christ. Tradition holds that both Peter and Paul were martyred on this day in the same year, around AD 64.

Church Teaching Connection

"We are called to love everyone, without exception; at the same time, loving an oppressor does not mean allowing him to keep oppressing us, or letting him think that what he does is acceptable. On the contrary, true love for an oppressor means seeking ways to make him cease his oppression. . . . Those who suffer injustice have to defend strenuously their own rights and those of their family, precisely because they must preserve the dignity they have received as a loving gift from God" (*Fratelli tutti*, 241).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 10:26-33

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus said to the Twelve: "Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of

those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Jesus addresses the fear of persecution as the apostles are sent on a mission that is sure to stir up controversy, especially among those in power. Jesus implores them to "fear no one" in the face of persecution. For centuries, persecution for Christian faith ended in death for countless martyred saints. There are still places in the world today where Christians are killed for their faith. In our daily lives, though, this persecution has been repackaged as negative social consequences for doing the right thing. As Christians, our mission is to love one another as Christ loves us. It's not enough to avoid sin; love means being actively concerned for the well-being and dignity of others.

► **What are some examples in school, work, or social lives where people fail to be actively concerned for the well-being of others out of fear of social persecution?**

Let's focus on two areas of practicing this active concern: bullying and gossip. Bullying is ongoing, unwanted aggressive behavior (in person or online), in a situation where there is some imbalance of

power. The word "unwanted" is crux. Sometimes we tell ourselves that it's just joking around; we don't really mean it. When it's unwanted, the teasing, mocking, insults, and name calling are bullying tactics that intimidate and harm. This includes manipulating someone to do something they don't want to do, whether it's pressure to share homework or do something immoral. Targets are often the subject of rumors and lies, intentionally excluded or left out, and may be pushed, shoved, tripped, receive threats, or even have their property destroyed. Obviously, a person of faith should never engage in this hateful, hurtful behavior. As followers of Christ, we are called to go further than avoiding this sin; we must actively stand up, speak out, and bring an end to such behavior.

► **When someone is being picked on or mocked, how has fear of persecution affected your response?**

Talking, texting, or posting about people behind their backs is gossip; it's sharing details about someone's life that don't actually involve you. Even if it's true, it's not your truth to share. Avoid this sin: don't talk about people and don't encourage it by listening. Do not be afraid to speak up and put an end to the gossip. Failing to stop it is a failure to love. At its core, sin is a failure to love. Jesus implores us to be more concerned about the harm these sins have on our soul than the pain of social consequences. We matter too much to God.

► **In what way do you struggle with gossip? How can your faith help you with this?**

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 210.

Being actively concerned for the well-being of others will lead to persecution.

Do not fear the negative social consequences of practicing your faith.

Remember how deeply God cares about you and the harm sin has on your soul.

Act on the Word

A Practiced Response

For this activity, you will need to show a short clip from the 2013 film *The Butler: the sit-in lunch counter scene*. If you do not have access to the whole film, the clip can be easily found online. Be sure to preview the clip ahead of time to be aware of its content and familiarize yourself with the plotline.

IMPORTANT ADVISORY NOTICE: The clip of this scene includes offensive language; use your discretion in presenting this to your group and prepare them for it if they have not seen the movie.

Begin this activity by sharing the following with the teens: Many people want to stand up and speak out in response to bullying or gossip, but don't know what to say in the heat of the moment. It's helpful to remember that during the Civil Rights era, protestors diligently prepared and practiced how to respond to persecution with peaceful nonviolence. The sit-in scene from *The Butler* provides a fictional reconstruction of the Black college students who sat quietly at a whites-only lunch counter, waiting to be served. The character (Louis Gaines) is fictional and didn't actually participate in these protests; otherwise, the narration and visuals are quite accurate. The protestors practiced remaining patient and quiet in the face of provocation. That practice helped them firm their resolve and enabled them to have courage as they faced persecution, insults, and violence. **IMPORTANT ADVISORY NOTICE:** The clip is emotionally intense and includes offensive language, as the scene is a reflection of the situations that actually occurred during that time period.

Show the clip, and invite discussion about having the courage to do the right thing in the face of persecution. Ask the teens why they think it was it so important that the protestors remained nonviolent?

Read aloud the "Church Teaching Connection" quote above (page 210) from Pope Francis' 2020 encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, focusing on his remarks on responding to oppressors.

As a large group, or in small groups, have the young people brainstorm and practice responding to bullying and gossip with love and truth. Encourage them to be realistic and creative, with calm, confident patience. Here are some suggestions of phrases to get started:

- ✦ Stop doing this; no one deserves to be treated this way.
- ✦ It's not okay to make fun of people; please stop.

Closing Prayer

Holy God,

your love conquers all things.

Pain, affliction, and darkness are
overwhelmed in your goodness.

Send a balm of peace upon the earth
that we may live in safety, joy, and dignity.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus

Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.