

JAN 31st: O. T. IV SUNDAY

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13; Luke 4:21-30.

The central theme of today's readings is that we should have and show the courage of our Christian convictions in our day-to-day lives. The first reading tells us how God called Jeremiah as His prophet and equipped him to face opposition and rejection. In his prophetic vocation, which he lived out while encountering rejection and persecution, Jeremiah anticipated Jesus, the greatest of all prophets.

Speaking to Jeremiah, God made four assertions: "*I formed you*" (as a potter forms clay), "*I knew you*" (referring to the intimate relationship between God and Jeremiah), "*I dedicated you*" (consecrating Jeremiah to do God's work), and "*I appointed you*" (to a mission as His prophet to Israel). At the start of Jeremiah's ministry, Yahweh warned the young prophet not to be intimidated by those to whom he prophesied (Jer 1: 4-5, 17-19). "*They will fight against you,*" Yahweh warned, "*but will not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you.*" During his lifetime Jeremiah was considered a total failure, but in later times he has been recognized as one of Israel's greatest prophets.

Today's Gospel is a continuation of last Sunday's gospel presenting his own people's reaction to Jesus' "*Inaugural Address.*" The reading shows us how Jesus faced skepticism and criticism with prophetic courage. Along with Jeremiah, Jesus and Paul believed that they were commissioned by God to proclaim a disturbing prophetic message (Jer. 1: 4-5, 17-19). No matter how strong the opposition, the three had the conviction that God was with them.

In the Gospel, the people challenged his Messianic claim, asking, "*Isn't this the son of Joseph?*" They could not understand how a mere carpenter could be the *Messiah* who would liberate them from Roman rule and reestablish the Davidic kingdom. Jesus explained their attitude by saying "*No prophet is accepted in his native place.*" Later John wrote, "*To his own he came but his own did not accept him*" (John 1: 11).

The story of Jesus' rejection in his own hometown is a story that we can identify with, because it is a story that happens to most of us. Perhaps we have experienced the pain of rejection, betrayal, abandonment, neglect or abuse. What about rejection by those closest to us? Often our friends, families fail to listen to us, and reject the words of grace, love and encouragement that we offer to them. How often have we discounted people through our pride and prejudice? We must realize that God's power is always available to transform even the most unlikely people, and that His power may come to us through unlikely instruments.

Let me conclude with a prayer from Mother Theresa of Calcutta: "Lord, I want to be an instrument of your word. In my thoughts, my speech, and my actions may I bring your love and salvation to all I meet. Help me to be creative and passionate as I seek to your good news."