

Homily for The Twenty Second Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year A)(30/08/20)

Poor Jeremiah is not a popular man. He sees very clearly the consequences of the way that Israel is heading (and that is what a prophet is, someone who sees clearly what sort of a future will result from the present we have chosen for ourselves) and he cannot help but speak. He cannot stop himself from speaking, because try as he might, saying 'I will not even think about God any more', he cannot help himself and he is exhausted with trying to stay silent, so that the word of God erupts from within him like a burning fire. He really wants a peaceful life, but there is no chance because there is no peace for the person who insists on shouting out the truth to a whole nation that has its fingers in its ears. Immediately before this passage Jeremiah has been beaten up and spent a night in the stocks for speaking unpalatable truths.

To explain how he got into this situation Jeremiah uses one of the most beautiful little phrases to describe how God has won him over: 'You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced'. The language that he uses is very specifically the language of seduction, as if God has presented to him an image that is enchanting, and irresistible and mesmerizing, bewitching him until the attraction of this image of God is simply overpowering. Jeremiah could not hold out, and allowed the beauty of the vision of God, the beauty of his truth, the awe and the wonder of his simple, honest authenticity to capture him so that all he can do is fall into the arms of the living God. Having been captured there is no way back, and of course he does not want a way back. He does not want to speak uncomfortable truths to blocked ears, but there is no choice as the one who puts the words in his mouth is of irresistible beauty. It is always God's wish to reveal to each of us something of his enchanting wonder, to seduce us with a charm that is so alluring that we cannot avoid it, cannot take our eyes from him, cannot drag ourselves away from a voice that sings to us a song of such loveliness. To fall into the arms of loveliness can be a testing thing, of course, because like Jeremiah we might find we have some unpalatable roles to fulfil, but at the same time to possess and be possessed by this loveliness is compensation enough. One of the great decisions for every human being is, standing in the presence of the beauty of Divine Love, will we open our eyes and let ourselves be seduced by him? Or will we screw up our eyes and refuse to look, so that we can maintain some illusion of control? Will we be able to sigh and say with Jeremiah 'You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced'?

St Paul would have known this passage well, of course, and he has something to say about seduction, too. We are lucky to have heard this beautiful passage from Jeremiah today, but we also hear one of the most glorious passages in all of St Paul's writing: 'Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modeled by your new mind'. St Paul knows a lot about human behaviour, and he knows how easily we simply fall into the habit of doing what everyone else is doing, of fitting in with the crowd. So he tells the Romans: your behaviour is not fixed and unchanging, all of us change, all of us develop new habits and take on new ideas, sometimes without even knowing

it is happening. So, where is that new behaviour coming from in your life? Whose ideas are you taking on? There are two choices: you either let your ideas and your behaviour be formed and modeled and changed by what people around you are doing; or you allow your mind, your will, your capacity to make good decisions, be formed by a renewal of your mind, a renewal that comes from living in the presence of God. I suppose in a sense you could ask, who are you allowing to seduce you: the world around and the ideas of the masses, or the loving beauty that is so ancient and so new. It has always been part of the role of the Church to stand apart from the spirit of the age and to bring timeless reality and lasting truth to bear on the issues of the day. We can do that because the influence that forms our minds is not the spirit of this age and the ideas of the day, it is something that stands outside all that. Because we let the ageless beauty seduce us, we can see clearly the weaknesses, but also the strengths, of the world as it is today. Sometimes that will be beautiful and joyful, sometimes it will be heartbreaking and painful. What are we going to do to make sure that our minds are remade by the timeless wonder? Is it time to allow ourselves to be seduced by God once more?