

Apart from me you can do nothing. (Jer 1:4-10, 1Cor 12:27-13)

* Dear Friends, whenever we travel by car or by foot we may find ourselves between a rock and a hard place or between the words *we must go* and *we cannot*; at the same time as believers, we may be in a difficult situation when the Word of God calls us to work by faith but we cannot. In connection with this idea I recall an example. Once I drove a heavily loaded Dodge across the mountains in Utah, around 50 miles east of Salt Lake City; there I entered a sharp-built-up road that kept all cars rushing slowly. It seemed to me all the drivers decided to reach to the sky. Staying in the right lane, I noticed that the engine of the truck made me believe that it is out of control; in response, I forced the pedal to the floor and kept it there until I got to the summit. I guess there was a problem with the fuel injection. Facing up to this situation in all its desperation I was like an engine without fuel. In fact each of us has had a chance to hang out with a difficult situation that we cannot overcome by our own strength; but as Christians, we may experience an even much greater weakness as we do the work of God by our own. The same mindset is found in the text from (Jer.1:4-10) assigned for today. But first let's say the word about the prophet Jeremiah if today were the 26th of June, the Day of his commemoration.

* From Jeremiah's account we learned that he was born of a priestly family and lived five miles north of Jerusalem, at the city Anathoth. In the thirteenth year of King Josiah (626 B.C.), while still a young man Jeremiah was called to be a prophet. He prophesied during the reigns of the five kings of Judah. In the landscape of history the time of his living was signified by two national tragedies. The first took place in 722 BC. when Shalmaneser V, the king of Assyria, destroyed Samaria and resettled its population. The second tragedy took place in the year 586 BC. when Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, overturned Jerusalem and removed the Jews from the Holy Land. Rabbinic tradition says, during the time after the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah lived at Mizpah, a city of Benjamin, that was not far from Jerusalem. It was then that he was forcibly dragged by the Jews to Egypt. Due to the lack of historical data, it is uncertain how the prophet died, whether his countrymen killed him or he died naturally. The total time of his prophetic ministry covered a period of more than forty years.

* Now after renewing our historical memory, let's look for the theological significance. If you are brave enough, imagine yourself as a prophet in ancient times who lives in the country where its king is a dictator and paranoiac. He might put to death anyone for criticizing him or even for giving him an unfriendly look. True to type of such a character I found among the Russian kings whose name was Ivan IV (called the Terrible), 1530–84. For example, in one of his rages he killed his son and heir, Ivan (1581). So, at a certain time the word of God came to your ears. God commanded you to go to the palace and prophesy against the czar

(king) and his officials for some reason. Then you hear a message of encouragement, *Don't be afraid of them for I am with you*, says the Lord, (Jer 1:8). Now, ask yourself, Am I brave enough to do the work of a prophet? And, do I trust God to save me as He promised?

* Friends, because you are a prophet and even though you are afraid, you go to a public place and proclaim loudly God's verdict against the czar and his supporters. With God's help your message breaks the ice between you and the middle class 'Messcanins'; at the same time it causes fire in feelings the police 'Oprichniki' and a handful orderless. As a result, you are captured, beaten, and put into prison, (Jer 37:15); you remain there until the next day. In the morning the *oprichniki* take you to talk with the dictator privately. While you are taken to the palace, you might think about God's promise. You also might ask yourself, *am I still strong enough to do God's work?* After your arrive the czar asks if you have prophecy for him, (Jer 37:17). Surprisingly you remain steadfast, and say: *Yes majesty; your city will be burned down, and your chief priest Macarious will fall down from a wall.* Upon hearing your brave tongue, your listeners exclaim, 'Wow!'

* Now when we think over Jeremiah's mission as it was ours, we can understand better another exclamation, when he said with a trembling voice, *Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth*, (Jer 1:6). Surely it was not a problem for the young educated Jew Jeremiah to say hello to a king; rather a problem was in a personal weakness to say the truth to a powerful man that could get him killed. The task was too difficult for Jeremiah; like a Jonah prophet, he wanted to *cut and run* away. Friends, you know, it is impossible for Jeremiah and for all Christians to do God's work on their own! Though it's not a big problem among us to acknowledge themselves as weak as babies and do nothing. But despite our and Jeremiah's acknowledgements of weakness, the Word continues to challenge us with a task we are not able to go with, as He says, *Do not say, 'I am only a youth' (weak); for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak*, (Jer 1:7). After hearing the message we find ourselves between a rock and a hard place, between having to go and not going.

* Friends, if God sends his people to do a mission, they need not be afraid that the mission will not be done successfully. Certainly it will be done!!! It doesn't matter how weak God's servant is or how great is the personal opposition! This statement can be proved from the lives of many of God's people including Jeremiah. There are several aspects worthy of note in connection with his ministry. First, in contrast to the strong conviction that the Lord will defeat all Judah's adversaries, Jeremiah proclaimed the destruction of Jerusalem and exile for Judah. He hammered away at a single message for forty years, but he was not believed as a true prophet. Under these circumstances the prophet's life was a hard one and his life was even in danger of death. If you asked, *how many Jews hated the prophet?*, it would be accurate to say,

All of them: priests, scribes, false prophets, elites, kings and so forth. There was a war party against Jeremiah. They accused, struck and mocked him on a regular basis! Undoubtedly Jeremiah liked to keep silent and yet had to speak, I said, I will not make mention of the Lord, nor speak anymore in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay, (Jer 20:9).

* Significantly, there was a certain time Jeremiah was not between a rock and a hard place anymore. Now he had a hammer to smash that rock and sweep the hard place away because the Lord put out his hand and touched Jeremiah's mouth, (v.9). The Lord said, *See, this day I have put you over the nations and over the kingdoms, for uprooting and smashing down, for destruction and overturning, for building up and planting,* (v.10). By this symbolic language the Scripture expresses the actions performed by God's power that took place in the world after the proclamation by a weak person Jeremiah, (18:7-10, 24:6, 29:5, 28, 31:28, 42:10). This power appeared in the flesh, through the ever living Word of God, that is Christ, our Lord!

* Dear Friends, since we were born from this ever living Word of God, (1Pe 1:23) we are not powerless anymore, (Heb 12:28). Each of us was assigned personally to do the work of God according to His will: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, **helping**, administrating, and various kinds of tongues, (1Co 12:28). In this list, did you find the job God handed to you? I think all of us are assigned to work in by **helping** others. Surely we are not powerless to give a hand to our Brothers and Sisters in Christ who may need our help. Therefore if we happen to be doing God's work, we should not be found between a rock and a hard place because we are not powerless to do good things. (Rom 12:21). Beloved let's God's power shine through you as it was shine through the prophet Jeremiah and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen