

Should We Pray For All People? (Jer 20:7-13; Mat 10:24-33; Rom 5:12-15).

* It is still a memorial among us - the heated discussions of a joining in public prayer soon after my summer vacation. That time we touched some points in terms of "how and with whom" we can pray in accordance with the teaching of our Synod. During debates we heard one's opinion; it was believed that God has never forbidden anyone to pray for the benefit of all people. In this instance, we've understood one's wish on this matter; but it is not quite true thinking of God's mind in such a narrow way. Of course, God's permanent intention is to save people, not to destroy. In this instance, God wants us to have the same mind with him and to pray according to his good will, (Act 10:2-4). He even appoints us to pray for the spiritual benefits of our enemies, (Mat 5:44) giving many examples in the Scripture. Thus, Abraham and Moses interceded for all people; Samuel interceded for the people as well as Nehemiah and Daniel, and the first martyr Stephen; these people we consider to be the notable intercessors. However, in contrast to these evidences, the LORD commands Jeremiah not to intercede for the people on several occasions. "*As for you (Jeremiah), do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you,* (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). In this instance, the prophet had the same mind with God through direct revelation. But we are not as gifted as Jeremiah; then how can we know the will of God in a particular situation in order to pray according to his will? Certainly we need the Helper, the Spirit of truth, who would himself intercede for us, and for the saints according to the will of God, (Rom 8:26, 27).

* Now, let's see Jeremiah's thought and motivation on the basis of our Sunday reading from (Jer 20:7-13). In this passage the prophet didn't intercede for the welfare of his people; instead he yearned for vengeance. This pattern can be seen in (v. 12) where the prophet prays, *But, O Lord of armies, testing the upright and seeing the thoughts and the heart, let me see your punishment come on them; for I have put my cause before you.* On our hearing Jeremiah's prayer, we like to recall his cause, as he mentioned. The cause is found in the beginning of this chapter. It says that Pashhur, the chief officer in the house of the LORD, ordered his people to beat Jeremiah, after that they put him in the stocks, where he remained until the next day. It appears from the context that there was a war-party against the prophet; those committed had sworn to destroy Jeremiah's life. *Let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may no more be remembered,* they said, (11:19). The war-party looked for any opportunity to blow the whistle on what the prophet said or deduced, *Report him! Let's report him!" they whispered enthusiastically,* (v.10). In fact, Jeremiah didn't commit any crime or throw someone off. But for the opposition it was not the case; they beat and disgraced him anyway;

they made it public for Jeremiah to be believed as a false prophet deserving a death penalty, (26:11). Therefore, Jeremiah's prayer appealed to the Lord for vengeance as the result of the grossest injustice of the opposition toward him.

* In order to be certain that Jeremiah understood God's words regarding the City, the people, and his own oppressors correctly, we'll give additional support for what we've already noted. As a start, let's say that Jeremiah would not be a true prophet if his prophecy did not come true. According to the record of Jeremiah's ministry, it says that the spiritual leaders and the upper class didn't give an ear and respond loyally to God's warning. In other words, the upper class continued to execute injustice between every man and his neighbor; they oppressed the alien, the fatherless, and the widow. Regarding the spiritual leaders, it says that they didn't turn the people to the God of their fathers, instead the spiritual leaders led Judah after other gods, (7:6,7). In addition, the elite believed the false prophets without concerning themselves about justice and mercy. In response to the flooding of immorality and all kinds of injustice, Jeremiah pronounced God's verdict - people would be taken into exile by Babylon, and for seventy years they would be held captive. Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed. Regarding his enemies, Jeremiah also pronounced God's verdict. *They will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced,* (v. 11).

* The validity of Jeremiah's prophecy is beyond any critical approach. Along with the Scripture, archeologists excavated a series of tablets that contain the Babylonian account and the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. During the 1,5 years of siege, Jeremiah remained a prisoner in the courtyard of the guardhouse. At that time he had received the message from God, - his eyes would see the disaster over the opposition, but he would not fall victim to violence. Then the Lord concluded, *You will escape with your life because you trust in me. I, the LORD, affirm it!*" (39:18). It happened as it was foretold. The City was overthrown by the Babylonians; the officials were partly executed, and the rest were taken to Babylon. Zedekiah, the king of Judah was also led into exile after terrible things were made to him by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, (39:6-7).

* The prophet who speaks in the name of the Lord is a true prophet if the words of his mouth come true. When Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled, his oppressors should conclude that Jeremiah spoke truth and his prayers against them come true as well. It is wrong to think that Jeremiah only carried a message of judgment. Thus throughout (Chapters 30-33), it is clearly portrayed that God had a glorious future for Jeremiah and a remnant of his people. In (vv. 10-11) of Chapter 30 the Lord promises: *"Jacob will again have peace and security... I am with you and will save you..."*

I will not completely destroy you." In this prophecy we find mercy beyond judgment. The people would return in 70 years. *"So there is hope for your future"* (31:17), says the Lord. A new covenant would replace the old and the Messiah would certainly come!

* Now we move from Jeremiah to the gospel lesson from (Mat 10:24-33). It narrates Jesus' encouragement of speaking the hidden knowledge boldly despite the threat on his life coming from the opposition. Here Jesus says, *what I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roof,* (v. 27). We may be puzzled regarding what kind of hidden knowledge the disciples will be assigned to disclose; is there a mystery of the Kingdom or something else? It may be both, but we are certain of one thing; when the deeds of the wicked became public, they will be mad as hell and they will turn into executioners, (v.28). This truth we've learned today is from Jeremiah's account and from our own life experiences. Thus, when the prophet made public the evil deeds of the upper class, the rulers turned into the executioners; but their furiousness couldn't stop God to work of proclamation, salvation, and judgment; God helped Jeremiah to prophecy boldly in front of his executioners. Now, the Lord Jesus addressed the words of consolation to his disciples, *Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*(v.31). On hearing these words, the Holy Spirit makes hearts able to preach truth, bear insults, false accusations and other injustices for Christ's sake.

* Now we come with the question, *should the disciples of Jesus pray to him for vengeance upon their oppressors as Jeremiah did?* The provocative question is simple, but it demands to say a little more in addition. As you remember, Jesus teaches us to love and to pray for our enemies, (Mat 5:44). That is what we've begun to practice since we were called from the darkness to the marvelous light. However, we don't remember if there is any command in the entire Scripture where God would ask his disciples to pray on behalf of people who once were reconciled with Him through Jesus Christ but later have fallen away. The apostle Paul says for such people it is impossible to be renewed, since they crucify the Son of God all over again to themselves and put Jesus to an open shame, (Heb 6:6). This notion was repeated by Jesus in the (v.33) of our gospel lesson. *But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.* Therefore, if the Holy Spirit lets you know such people, you know what to do, (1Jn 5:16). But because many of us cannot distinguish "wheat from chaff," Martin Luther recommended to consider every Christian as a saint and treat him with love and compassion. But it is your free option to follow Luther's mind or not.

* The final lesson from (Rom 5:12-15) leads all Jesus' disciples to look critically at themselves.

If we believe in Jesus Christ, we also believe that we are sinners who deserve nothing more than death, (12-14). If we are still alive, we are alive only by the grace of God who loves us (v.15) and who gave His only begotten Son to be crucified so that we may have peace with Him through faith in his Son and live for righteousness. While Christ is our Savior, and the author of our salvation, we need to watch ourselves wisely in order to be found not among the opposition and be kept from the prolusion of this world by God's grace. Doing so, we are guaranteed from falling with shame as it happened with Jeremiah's oppressors.

Beloved, grace and peace to you from our God Jesus Christ.

Amen