

## Always Do the Right Thing

‘No good deed goes unpunished.’ Probably, we’ve all heard this expression at one time or another. It speaks to the notion that, even when we try to do something good, we can land in trouble. I may try to give a friend some constructive criticism to help him/her and find that the person does not appreciate my remarks.

In the First Reading for this Sunday (Jer. 20: 7-9), the prophet Jeremiah tries his best to be faithful to his calling from God. The people of Judah had fallen into the practise of idolatry and the adoption of pagan cults. Jeremiah brought God’s message to the people prophesying: ‘Violence and destruction!’ For being faithful to his calling from God and attempting to lead the people along the right path, Jeremiah was arrested, imprisoned and suffered public disgrace. It’s no wonder that he said: ‘the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.’ Jeremiah tried to do the right thing and for that he was punished.

In the Gospel (Matt. 16: 21-27), Jesus tells of a similar fate. Up till this point, He had been a star. He had traveled from place to place feeding the crowds both spiritually and physically, healing the sick and the lame and the blind, and raising people from the dead. But, while doing these things, Jesus had run afoul of the religious and political leaders. Now Jesus tells His disciples that He will soon go to Jerusalem where He will be denounced, taken prisoner, and killed. For being faithful to the will of the Father, Jesus would be punished and, ultimately, crucified.

Jeremiah and Jesus followed the will of the Father and both of them suffered harsh treatment, but there was a fundamental difference between them. Jeremiah was a human while Jesus was divine. When Jeremiah was rejected for his efforts, he thought that he had failed. Jeremiah tried to lead the people to live in accordance with the will of God but, in response, they punished him.

But Jesus, being divine, knew His mission and, being faithful to the will of the Father to the end, He knew that His efforts would be successful, even though, in terms of human understanding, He appeared to have failed when He died on the Cross.

This a lesson for all of us. We should not judge whether we are doing the right thing by whether our efforts are accepted or rejected. We must discern the will of God and continue to follow it even if it costs us dearly. We may lose money or power or position or friends but God calls us to persevere. Even after being rejected, Jeremiah remained true to his calling when he said: ‘If I say, I will not mention Him, or speak any more in His name, then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.’

Jeremiah had to do God’s will. He had no choice. He was like a volcano with lava just beneath the surface ready to erupt. If he tried to avoid his calling, it would have exploded out of him. And this is how it should be for us. To follow the will of God for us should not be a source of ‘reproach and derision’ but rather an unquenchable fire that drives us every day.

St. Paul in the Second Reading provides encouragement when he says: ‘Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect.’ Can there be a more noble pursuit than to discern the will of God and to act on it? Regardless of how it is received, how can we can hold back from discerning and doing what is good and acceptable and perfect?