

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A central theme in today's readings speaks to the evangelical call each of us possesses as children of God. A beautiful manifestation of that call is so well articulated by the prophet Jeremiah who wrote: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you." Imagine that: God called us from before the beginning of time to our baptismal call. Several years ago I attended a baptism at St. John of God Newman Chapel in San Francisco for a child whose large family was close to my own. Emmy's (Emmy was baptized) father John had been an original member of the St. Louis Jesuits. During the baptismal rite he played a song which included the words, "Yahweh called me before I was born, from my mother's womb he proclaimed my name." I will never forget that day. These words were so impactful as I began, even as a middle school student, to ponder both the depths of God's love for us and the summons to proclaim that love in the world.

There is a precise parallel between the challenges of the prophetic call expressed in Jeremiah and Jesus' claim that "no prophet is accepted in his own native place." Jeremiah assures us that "they will fight against you but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." The difficulty at times of being a prophetic voice is that it disturbs the prevailing order of things. How many dozens of times have we heard the adage that "we don't need to change things? We've always done it this way!" There is an element of unsettling and disequilibrium when there is a call for a new order of things. That was certainly the experience of Jesus in teaching the people of Israel the deeper implications of the law. He was met time and again with hostility by those temporal and religious authorities who wanted to maintain the status quo. However, he prevailed in his Father's mission and so we are invited, in our own day and generation, to do the same. Yes, it is difficult to challenge ourselves and others to a more radical living out of the Gospel. Any proposition of living as Jesus commands us is not easy. Yet, with God's grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we like the disciples hidden in the upper room at Pentecost, can be prophetic voices in the world.

St. Paul expresses this most powerfully in his Letter to the Corinthians. "Brothers and sisters: strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a more excellent way." That more excellent way is the experiential dimension of love. All things we do must be predicated upon love or their value is shallow. Christian maturity calls us to faith, hope and love and when we nurture these within ourselves we are able to nurture and support others in that same call. When we imbue these values in our lives we are able to conform to the missionary zeal of Jesus himself who confounded the conventional wisdom and brought the message of God's redemptive love to those left in the margins, on the outskirts of acceptable society. He incurred the wrath of the leaders of the establishment when he noted that Elijah didn't go to the widows of Israel but rather to the widow in Zarephath in Sidon (a foreign land) and the prophet Elisha ministered to the leper Naaman the Syrian (another foreigner).

Let us not be afraid to renew faith, hope and love in our own lives and communities and to share our baptismal call most especially to those left on the margins who most need to hear the Good News!