

Week 4 – Ordinary Time – January 31, 2010

“Why is this happening to me?” is a question that haunts many people who suffer an illness, have some crisis in the family, or get involved in an accident – anything that doesn’t have a logical explanation. Whenever good things happen to us unexpectedly, we rarely ask, “Why me?” in those circumstances. But it bothers us when things inexplicably go wrong.

If you’ve ever asked the question, “Why is this happening to me?” you are standing in the company of a great biblical figure, Jeremiah the prophet. In the Old Testament there are 16 books by prophets. We divide them into the 4 major and 12 minor prophets because of the length of their books, but also because of the significance of what they say. The 4 major ones are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. When the *Star Wars* movies came out a number of years ago there was some speculation that the Jedi warriors were given that name because you can spell Jedi from the first letters of the 4 major prophets from the bible. Jeremiah is unique because he struggled with his vocation, and he tells you his inner thoughts. He tells you more than you want to know; he would have made a perfect guest on daytime television talk shows.

Our first reading comes from the first chapter of Jeremiah, and we hear it today because Jesus finds himself in a similar predicament in the gospel – chosen as a prophet, but finding that it’s not easy. God calls Jeremiah to his vocation, but Jeremiah says, “I don’t know how to speak; I’m just a kid – thank you, but why don’t you choose someone else?” A lot of us feel this way. We discover some great challenge has appeared in our life, a challenge we never asked for, but there it is, unexpected, yet demanding a lot of attention. You can almost hear God say, “I’ve chosen you for this responsibility;” and you want to say back, “Gee, thanks for your confidence in me, but I’m not up to this; thank you, but no thank you.” When the task does not go away, we often revert to the question, “Why me? Why should I be the one?”

In speaking to Jeremiah, God does not directly answer this question. But of course God does not directly answer a lot of questions we pray about. Instead, Jeremiah hears two different messages from God. One is, “I want you,” and the other is, “I will help you.” But not, “I will explain this to you.” To be exact, God says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you.” And then a few verses later, “they will fight against you but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” God knew full well that Jeremiah would face many struggles as a prophet, but God needed to have his own message heard more than he needed for Jeremiah to have a more comfortable life. In retrospect we can say that God knew Jeremiah’s capabilities better than Jeremiah did, and because of that, great things happened when this prophet spoke.

When you catch yourself asking the question, “Why me?” there probably is an answer to it, but you may never realize what it is. Still, these two things each of us should realize whenever

we face challenges we did not cause: God wants us in this situation, and he will help us to succeed.