

Homily of Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, 2026

Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 69:10-17, 33-35; Romans 5:12-15; Matthew 10:26-33

Jeremiah was one of the prophets God sent to prophesy to the people of Israel to turn from their sinful ways or they would face divine judgment. Jeremiah prophesied that since the people had failed to repent of their evil ways, a foreign power was going to conquer them, take them captives, and destroy the temple and Jerusalem. For such prophecy, Jeremiah was persecuted and was nearly killed. The first reading is a prayer of Jeremiah while he was being persecuted. Jeremiah teaches us to commit our persecutors into God's hand. He prayed:

"But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not prevail. In their failure, they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion. ... Let me see the vengeance you take on them, for to you, I have entrusted my cause. Sing to the Lord, ... For he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the evildoers! (Jeremiah 20:11-13).

Jeremiah represents messengers of truth everywhere who are persecuted, or silenced, or eliminated: in families, neighborhoods, groups, workplaces, institutions, organizations, churches, countries, and so on.

Today's gospel is Jesus' encouragement to his apostles to be fearless in proclaiming the Good News. He reminded them that, later on, their witnessing the Good News would attract persecution. He encouraged them not to be discouraged because their sustenance would come from God.

Violent persecution of Christians is going on in several parts of the world. In those places, Christians are killed, church buildings and properties are burned down or destroyed. Christians' rights and privileges are denied them or taken away from them. We pray for the Christians who stay strong in those places and dangerous conditions.

Another type of persecution is anti-Christian policies whereby anti-Christian foundations are being dismantled. Christian principles, values, symbols, education, and identifications are condemned as offensive and removed. The adverse effects of the anti-Christian actions on the society are obvious. It is clearly seen in the rise of all kinds of crimes and crises. Someone says, "Life without Christ is Crises."

Jesus tells us in today's gospel not to be afraid or discouraged. Jesus says, "... Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul ... Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father..." By this statement, Jesus promises rewards to those who remain witnesses during persecution.

Jesus' encouragement to those persecuted does not dismiss the fact that it is the responsibility of governments to protect the citizens from kidnapping, torture, abuses, destruction, and mindless killings by persecutors. It is heartbreaking to see governments persecuting their own citizens, and governments being collaborators and accomplices with persecutors' heinous persecutions and crimes as it is the case in Nigeria.

According to a news report, between 2015 and 2025, at least 212 Catholic priests were kidnapped in Nigeria. 15 were murdered. The real number of cases is certainly higher. These figures do not include the religious men and women, and leaders of other Christian denominations who suffered the same fate. Countless number of churches and church properties were burned down or destroyed. The exact number of hundreds of communities destroyed and displaced people is not known. The persecution is continuing unabated in 2026.

However, it is easy for us to see persecution out there but fail to see persecution within (amongst ourselves). Do we intentionally and knowingly persecute others by our words and actions?

Jesus promises us in today's gospel that all the hairs of our heads are counted and that we are not to be afraid. We earnestly pray for God's divine intervention in the lives of victims of persecution and violence.

Let us conclude with Prophet Jeremiah's prayer in the first reading:

"The Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not prevail. In their failure, they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion. ... Let me see the vengeance you take on them, for to you, I have entrusted my cause. Sing to the Lord, ... For he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the evildoers!" Amen.

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