

Jeremiah's Politics

March 27, 2010

As Jeremiah is the Old Testament prophet for Passiontide, so he is also the prophet for modern times. His being the prophet for Passiontide is apparent from the Holy Week liturgy where, to express her grief for the Passion and Death of Our Lord, Mother Church draws heavily on Jeremiah's "Lamentations" for the destruction of Jerusalem in 588 B.C. Jeremiah's being the prophet for our own times was the view of Cardinal Mindszenty, no doubt because the Cardinal saw the sins of his own world calling even more for the denunciations of Jeremiah than did those of Judah, and leading just as surely to the destruction of our present sinful way of life.

Now in the domain of politics and economics, a number of commentators today (accessible on the Internet) clearly see that destruction coming, but they do not connect it with religion, because either they, or the bulk of their readers, starting from below, do not think upwards. Jeremiah on the contrary, starting from above with his dramatic call from God (Chapter I), sees politics, economics, everything, in the floodlight of the Lord God of Hosts. Thus after denouncing at length the horrifying perfidy of Judah and its sins against God and after announcing Judah's punishment in general (Ch. II-XIX), he makes political prophecies in particular: the Judeans will be taken captive to Babylon (XX), with their King Sedecias (XXI), and Kings Joachaz, Joakim and Joachin will all be punished (XXII).

Such prophecies do not make Jeremiah popular. The priests of Jerusalem arrest him (XXVI), a false prophet defies him (XXVII), King Joakim himself seeks to destroy the prophet's writings (XXXVI), and finally the princes of Judah throw him down a muddy well to die, from which he is only rescued by an Ethiopian (XXXVIII). Immediately Jeremiah ventures back into politics, by urging – in vain – King Sedecias to surrender to

the Babylonians, which would have spared the King great suffering.

Obviously the secular and religious authorities of decadent Jerusalem did not like what the man of God was telling them, but at least they had enough sense of religion to take him seriously. Would not today both Church and State dismiss him as a "religious nutcase" and tell him to "stay out of politics"? Have not Church and State alike today so cut politics loose from religion that they are blind to how profoundly their godless politics are branded by their very godlessness? In other words, men's relation to their God impregnates and governs everything they do, even when that relation is on men's part one of utter indifference towards God.

So if any of us follow this year an Office of "Tenebrae" ("darkness"), let Jeremiah's grief for Jerusalem laid waste evoke for us not only Mother Church's sorrow for the Passion and Death of Our Divine Lord, but also the Sacred Heart's own measureless grief for an entire world sinking into sins which will bring down its utter destruction, unless we heed the plaintive cry of "Tenebrae": "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, turn to the Lord thy God."