

**Below are homily notes preached by Archbishop Richard Gagnon  
at Our Lady of Assumption Parish in Carberry  
on the occasion of the parish feast day (August 15<sup>th</sup>).**

20<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*JEREMIAH 38:4-10; PSALM 40; HEBREWS 12: 1-4; LUKE 12:49-53*

The prophet Jeremiah is certainly one of the most interesting of the Old Testament major prophets and one that I personally find very fascinating. His is often seen to be a kind of forerunner to Christ himself due to his great difficulty in calling the Chosen People to reform their lives. Basically he called the people to return back to God and leave the idols of their lives – idols of all kinds, those taken from the religious practices of the people surrounding them, but also the worship of money and worldly power without reference to God in their lives.

Our Synod in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg is meant to be much like this. There is always a great challenge in changing our ways. There is a challenge in making an effort to deepen our discipleship. And there is a challenge in seeking true conversion in our lives.

Our Archdiocesan Synod was based on three general areas of outreach:

1. Disciples of Jesus build up the Church of active believers: This applies directly to your own parish of the Assumption of Our Lady. Each person in this community is important and is meant to play a part in this. Our Synod Implementation contains suggestions on how and what to implement in your parish community. One of the overall suggestions has to do with prayer when you gather in your groups, namely *Lectio Divina*. It's very easy to simply say a prayer before meetings in order to get it done! But what we are talking about here is to spend time with Scripture and share your reflections with your brothers and sisters. Often Catholics are hesitant to talk about their faith. Let us begin the call to change and conversion starting in our own parish community.
2. Disciples outreach to those less active in their faith: This is a very large group of people and we are called to be good examples of Christian living in our own lives through word and action. We must not be afraid to witness to Christ and not be embarrassed to talk about our faith. In a sense we are called, as the Bible says, to give witness to the cause of our joy. Finally, we must all be ministers of hospitality in our willingness to invite other Catholic to Church and Church events and to provide a true environment of Christian hospitality in our parishes.
3. Disciples are open to building relationships with other Christians and people of other religions: This is what we refer to as ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue respectively. We must remember that Jesus prayed fervently for all followers of the Way to be one just as Jesus was one with the Father. Because of this, ecumenism is more than a simple outreach to others but is indeed a duty for disciples of Jesus. Personally, I have found that ecumenical activities and cooperation with other Christians are important and inspiring activities that I am sure, please our Father in heaven. Our parishes need to be connected to ecumenical endeavours. In regards to inter-faith dialogue, let us remember that Our Lord had particular praise for certain Roman soldiers who displayed hearts of good will and even faith. Inter-faith dialogue can contain many new experiences that teach us that the Holy Spirit is active in mysterious ways among mankind. We begin this by having a certain openness first of all towards people of the Abrahamic faiths like ourselves, namely the Jews and the Muslims. But the Church has taught us through the years that aspects of truth can be found in all world religions. In short, we want to be a credible witness to our God to others just as Jesus

was in the minds of certain Roman soldiers. As the saying goes, we just might be the only Gospel that many people will read – we are to be walking Gospels of Jesus Christ.

Our Synod's theme is: *Disciples: Established, Anointed and Sent in Christ*. This implies being missionary disciples who have the spirit of Jeremiah with a willingness to live in the truth and proclaim the things of God to others. We should consider that the times in which we are living are not entirely different than those during Jeremiah's lifetime. There are many idols today to which we give worship and much false religion. There is often a temptation to a lifestyle that has no reference to the true God. Faith is often rejected and pushed aside as in Jeremiah's day. But the message we learn from Jeremiah is that we must remain faithful and strive with all our hearts to live the Joy of the Gospel as Pope Francis would say. In the Second Reading for today we hear these words from Hebrews: "*Brothers and Sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight of sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance, the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...*"

In the Gospel today, Jesus outlines very clearly what he intends to do and how he will suffer in carrying out. In fact, he says that he came to light a fire on earth: "How I wish it were already kindled". We know that such words have a long Biblical resonance referring to purification and holiness – in other words, conversion to God and the courage to change.

Consider that this fire still burns. It burns even yet in our hearts does it not? But sadly in the hearts of many today this fire is turning to ashes through indifference, complacency and the love of idols. This gives Christ much sorrow as he wishes that all be saved! We know that he will grant a full pardon to the most harden of hearts but this depends on the willingness to change and repent. The division that Jesus talks about in the Gospel today can very clearly be the result of hearts not willing to change and turn away from sin. And this is precisely why there are disciples –missionary disciples! We are to be Christ's hands, feet, eyes, mouth, and heart to others.

Hebrews has the final word on this: "*Consider Jesus who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you might not grow weary or lose heart*".