

Jeremiah from his first calling knew that he was to be made into a pillar of bronze, a wall of iron to confront God's people - that is, his own people - in God's name. The pain of confrontation is something we all know. We also know it is easier to confront a natural enemy with a whole heart, than it is to confront our nearest and dearest. Then we are divided in our minds by a great tension; the very people we love, and look to for security and for our place in the world, are the ones we feel obliged to attack.

Some people seem made to enjoy confrontation, and relish the sound and smell of battle. Perhaps for such people there seems to be little tension involved: they are so sure of themselves and their rightness that the battle comes naturally. But Jeremiah was certainly not one of these. He hated this vocation to oppose, denounce, and charge others; he longed for peace and conciliation. There was no refuge for him with Go, because it was from God that the demand to fight was coming to him, inexorable, impossible to evade; we know this because he tells us it was so.

⁸ *For whenever I speak, I have to howl and proclaim, 'Violence and ruin!' For me, Yahweh's word has been the cause of insult and derision all day long.*

⁹ *I would say to myself, 'I will not think about him, I will not speak in his name any more,' but then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. The effort to restrain it wearied me, I could not do it.*

In today's reading Jeremiah stands at last in the heart of the Holy Land, in the holiest place he can reach, and warns the people in God's name, that unless they listen to their prophet and repent, the whole Temple and the city and the land itself will be lost to them, their religious world will fall into catastrophic ruin. For this speech in this place he will risk his life.

Jeremiah is showing us a foreshadowing of Jesus. But even as we read this and understand it, we can see a difference. There is in Jesus no trace of the divided mind that so characterises Jeremiah. He has no doubts about his vocation and its truth; he knows that in his message lies the well-being and ultimate salvation of those he addresses, and that there is no other way for them to find life, except through him.

This is the knowledge, this is the truth, that will spell out his fate. We crucify those who make a divine claim on our trust. Jeremiah knew this, and yet had the courage to do what God asked of him. The martyrs follow in these prophetic footprints. We ourselves, as we live out in our imperfect and wounded lives the trust and obedience God wants of us, stumble forwards in the same path. From our weakness we pray for the upholding hand of Christ, that we may recognise his prophetic presence in our own country, and embody the word of God in whatever way we can.