

Vincentiana, July-October 2004

Homily of G. Gregory Gay, C.M., for the Mass with the New General Council

Readings: Jeremiah 7:1-11; Matthew 13:24-30

Rome, 24.VII.2004

I have yet another confession to make — this is the first full homily I have written since being a deacon some 25 years ago. I understand the need for it, but as we can imagine, it is somewhat restricting.

I have two simple points and a conclusion for our reflection from God's word today.

Twice in the reading from Jeremiah the Lord promises to make his dwelling among the people — and specifically he says “in this place” — an obvious reference to the temple, but for us...?

St. Vincent clearly states God's dwelling place is among the poor. “It is among the poor,” he tells us, “that we experience true religion” (cf. SV XII, 171). Among the poor we come face to face with the God who loves us.

We experience God, Jeremiah tells us, when we deal justly with our neighbor. And in another place in scripture, Jesus clearly defines for us who our neighbor is — and it is best understood from a collective point of view: justice for the outcasts, marginalized, impoverished of our world.

We experience God when we no longer “oppress the resident alien.” Let those of us who live in the northern part of the world take heed to these words of God spoken through his prophet. The situation of migrants throughout the world continues to worsen. They are among the poor we are called to accompany in a special way in our times.

We experience God when we reach out to the orphan, the widow, those abandoned, lonely, and excluded from the opportunity of living a dignified human life.

We experience God when we no longer “shed innocent blood,” but rather struggle to promote and even demand peace of our

government leaders, especially those who look to promote their own interests at the cost of disrespecting the sovereignties of others.

Today's Gospel invites us to live such an experience of God in the midst of the world with all that is good and bad about it. We need to assure ourselves that in our daily living out of our Vincentian identity we be immersed in the world in which we live where 80% of its population is poor.

There can be that grave temptation to escape from the "real world," distance ourselves from the plight of the poor, living comfortably and many times indifferently.

My brothers and sisters, God's word — Jesus incarnate — invites us to be immersed in the world. Yet to do so well — and not to become complacent with "things as they are" — we are called to give our hearts to his power of grace. It is God's love which empowers us to live and work and struggle with the impoverished.

God's love calls us first to our own personal and communal conversion — to a recommitment each day of our lives to serve him in our service of the poor.

Our service can only be sustained and continued with vigor when we allow the experience of God in the poor speak to our heart and mold our lives — and that demands that we listen, that demands that we meditate, contemplate, pray — alone and together. The good seed has been sown. Let us look to cultivate its growth in our lives together.

As members of the great Vincentian Family, strengthened and nourished by God's love in the Eucharist we share, let us be courageous and plunge ourselves deeply into the lives of the poor of our world and let us do so with great love, simplicity and humility.