

The Hard Life of a Prophet

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On May 1st the Church honors the Prophet Jeremiah, a sensitive soul who was called by God to do things that would have been difficult even for a person less easily bruised.

God instructs His young prophet to warn Jerusalem of foreign invaders from the north. So Jeremiah addresses the people: "In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life. For I heard a cry as of a woman in travail, anguish as of one bringing forth her first child, the cry of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands, "Woe is me! I am fainting before murderers" (4:30-31).

In popular literature, prophets are sometimes depicted as mirthless killjoys who take pleasure in spoiling everyone's good times and bringing messages of doom. But this is not true of most of the prophets, and certainly not of Jeremiah. His message burdens his heart: "My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war" (4:19).

Through Jeremiah, God accuses the people not only of turning from Him, but of embracing false, powerless gods: "...for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (2: 13). This is in painful contrast to the good things God has done for them: "When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of harlots" (5: 7b).

God is concerned with more than His people's wandering off to impotent gods. Through Jeremiah He accuses them of unkindness toward one another: "Like a basket full of birds, their houses are full of treachery; therefore they have become great and rich, they have grown fat and sleek. They know no bounds in deeds of wickedness; they judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy" (5: 27-28).

Jeremiah describes what happens to a culture in which people no longer care about each other: "Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother; for every brother is a supplanter, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they commit iniquity and are too weary to repent" (9: 4-5).

Finally, he poetically contrasts God's intentions with what actually happened: "I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me" (3: 19).

Reluctant to deliver harsh messages, sensitive to mistreatment, Jeremiah still relied on God's word: "I am with you, to save you and deliver you" (15: 20b).

Kontakion - Tone 3

Cleansing your radiant heart through the Spirit,
O great Prophet and Martyr,
glorious Jeremiah,
You received from on high the gift of prophecy.
You cried out with a great voice to the nations:
This is our God, and there is none other beside Him
who became incarnate and appeared on earth.