

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost / August 30th

The First Illumination | Jeremiah 15:15-21

The youthful prophet Jeremiah's sometimes angry, frequently despondent prophecies have earned him the nickname "Weeping Prophet." We hear a little of both emotions in Sunday's Track Two first reading. Jeremiah confronts God and begs him to bring down retribution on those who are persecuting him. He spoke out on God's behalf, Jeremiah declares, even though it was hard, but those ungrateful people only insulted him. "Why," he wails, "is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?" God responds with kindness, reassuring him: "they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you."

The Psalm Illumination | 133

One might wonder if Jesus had Psalm 26 in mind when he made an example of a Pharisee who boasted loudly of his righteousness when he prayed. The Pharisee thanked God that he was not like the thieves, rogues, adulterers, and tax collectors he saw around him. It would be easy to read that kind of prideful piety into these verses, too. But listen to them instead with the perspective of Jeremiah's call for God's grace, and envision a God whose lovingkindness inspires us to worship with thanksgiving and songful procession, loving the place where God's glory abides.

The Epistle Illumination | Romans 12:9-21

We have journeyed with Paul in his letter to the people of Rome on the Sundays after Pentecost since June. We have listened and learned as Paul worked out a new theology, discerning how we receive new life in God's grace through Christ. Now we are approaching the end of this letter. During the next three weeks we will hear him conclude with a beautiful, poetic summary of his call to Rome's Jewish and Gentile Christians to live together in love. "Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another," he writes in this passage. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

The Gospel Illumination | Matthew 15:10-28

In last week's Gospel we heard Jesus praise Peter, calling him the rock upon which he would build a church. Now, in the verses that immediately follow, Jesus tells the apostles that he will have to suffer, die and be raised again. Peter angrily objects, prompting Jesus to turn and declare Peter "Satan," ordering him out of his sight. The evangelist we know as Matthew, perhaps reflecting evolving Christian theology a generation or two after the crucifixion, depicts a powerful image of Jesus as Messiah, predicting his own death and resurrection as necessary steps toward the universal justice that will come with God's kingdom.