

Our Old Testament Lesson begins with an image that would have been familiar to the citizens of Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is watching a potter working at his wheel. This is a very skilled job. The clay has been properly prepared, kneaded to make sure there are no air pockets to cause the pot to crack when it is fired. The lump of clay has to be centred on the wheel. Then begins the process of carefully forming the pot. The potter must keep his hands moist and steady – any sudden movement and the pot goes all over the place and he has to start the process all over again.

We don't get a chance to watch a potter at work very often but you do see pavement artists at work in the city centre. There is a lovely sequence we see sometimes on RTE as the Angelus rings at 6:00pm of an artist reproducing "The Praying Hands" on the pavement opposite the Front Gate of Trinity College.

There can be nothing rushed in pottery, in painting, in drawing. There is a patient working in and through the materials to hand. There is that willingness to go back, to start again and again; to mould, to paint, to draw until the desired result is obtained. There is a commitment to the work in hand. Only when it is complete does the artist put her or his initials in the corner.

That day, we find Jeremiah standing, looking at the potter at work at his wheel as he takes the clay from the earth and patiently working it, forming it until he has formed the clay from the earth into something useful, even beautiful. As he stands there he thinks of God patiently working in and through our frail and wilful humanity.

If we step back from that scene and look at the broad sweep of the Old Testament story we see two inter-twining threads running through the narrative, those of judgement and new beginnings. We see it in the story of the

Flood; out of the devastation of the Flood a new start is made in Noah. We see it in the Exodus – there is the disobedience at Sinai as the people make and worship the Golden Calf; the people who left Egypt do not enter the land but their descendants do. There is the recurrent cycle in the period of the Judges. Israel sins; Israel suffers; Israel makes a new start. This continues through the story of Saul, of David, of Solomon. There is the Exile and the return from Babylon.

For Jeremiah that day, the potter patiently working and reworking the clay is a powerful symbol. There is the power, the patience, the purpose of God. This continues through into Incarnation. God in Christ at one with God, at one with man. As we are reminded in those opening words of John's Gospel:

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

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<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

God so loved the world – the world in all its frailty, its messiness; its glory and its shame – that he gave.

What we have here is a picture of the commitment of God to this world he has made. We, made as we are in the image of God, ones for whom Christ died, are called to reflect, to incarnate something of the divine commitment to the world, channels of God's love, channels of God's giving.

It is with this picture in my mind that I turn to the Gospel appointed for today, from the Gospel according to St Luke, with its call by Jesus to his hearers to follow in his footsteps the way of the cross. Jesus uses the image of a man building a tower, the need to think through what is needed to complete the task. Jesus, who in himself embodies God's abiding commitment to man, calls us to a service in which nothing is held back, that has something of the character of God's abiding commitment to us.

These intertwining themes of God's commitment to us and our response to God are brought together in the sacrament of Baptism. I sometimes say to parents as they prepare for their child's Baptism, that God for his part has given his all – it is for us, for our children to pick it up and run with it. And so in the Service of Baptism, as the child is marked with the sign of the Cross, I will say

Christ claims you for his own.  
Receive the sign of the cross.

Live as a disciple of Christ,  
fight the good fight,  
finish the race, keep the faith.

**Confess Christ crucified,  
proclaim his resurrection,  
look for his coming in glory.**

So on this day, as we have stood with Jeremiah and watched the potter at his work and thought of God's patience, God's purpose; as we have heard again Jesus' call to wholehearted discipleship, may we live out in daily living the call of our Baptism and

Live as a disciple of Christ,  
fight the good fight,  
finish the race, keep the faith.