

**Homily for June 19, 2005  
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Jeremiah 20:10-13  
Psalm 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35  
Romans 5:12-15  
Matthew 10:26-33**

## *As followers of Jesus, we are called to an integrity our world desperately needs.*

The response of the world at the death and funeral of Pope John Paul II was a sight to behold. Throngs of people of every religious affiliation gathered in Rome and in cities all over the world to show their respect. Particularly obvious was the participation of young people. Why was this man so loved?

These throngs of people may not have followed all of the directives the pope had issued during his long pontificate, nor had they agreed with all of his teachings. This outpouring was not simply an expression of pity for an old man whose public diminishment was now ended, for John Paul II attracted crowds throughout his entire reign. What was it about this man?

In a world that has witnessed so much deceit, manipulation and violence in its leaders, Pope John Paul II was seen by most as a man of integrity. One might disagree with him, but his fundamental goodness was never questioned. Insistence on the innate God-given dignity of all women and men, not personal gain, was the wellspring of his life. People the world over found in him the integrity for which they long. One

cannot help asking: Why does there seem to be so little integrity in the world today? Perhaps because of the price that it exacts.

Today's readings offer us examples of this kind of integrity, the cost one might have to pay because of it, and the source of strength needed to be faithful to it. The Prophet Jeremiah's prophetic message of condemnation in chapter 20 met with resistance from both the political and the religious officials of his day. Even his friends turned against him. His very life was in jeopardy. Still, he was not deterred from his commitment. Rather, he relied on God alone: "The Lord is with me like a mighty champion," he writes. Confident that God would intervene, Jeremiah remained steadfast in the face of bitter persecution.

In the Gospel, Matthew chapter 10, we see Jesus exhorting his disciples to stand firm in the face of similar persecution. He tells them to proclaim the Gospel fearlessly and to acknowledge their commitment to him, regardless of the price they may have to pay for their steadfastness. Their fidelity placed their lives in jeopardy as well. Still, Jesus assures them that even though they may have to endure physical suffering, the God who is attentive to the sparrows will certainly care for them.

In the end, will it make any difference what a disciple did or did not do? Saint Matthew presents Jesus stating an emphatic “yes” in chapter 10. The call to discipleship is the call to faithful responsibility. It is not about power, influence, or position. It is about bearing witness to Jesus the Son of God and the message of his teaching and ministry. Jesus promises to acknowledge those who, in the face of fear, have had the courage to publicly proclaim him. That promise is denied to those who succumb to fear and fail in their responsibility. This is a sobering thought for those who think it does not matter.

Few of us will ever find ourselves on the world stage as was Pope John Paul II or Jeremiah, or as were even the first disciples. But we are all called upon to acknowledge our Christian discipleship through the respect we show others, the honesty of our dealings with them, and the unselfishness of our lives. In so many ways, our society seems to disdain such values. It even ridicules those who stand for them. Still, this is the kind of integrity expected of all of us. Our world is in desperate need of it.

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