

If you let today's First Reading sink in, you feel the prophet Jeremiah's fire in the belly. By 626 B.C., God didn't recognize His Chosen People anymore; they no longer reflected His values. They were behaving just like all of the pagan nations around them. Most Judeans were no longer living within the discipline of their faith. And no prophets were going to tell them what to do.

They even tolerated the injustice of homelessness, that had never existed while they were 12 tribes; but after becoming a nation, widows, orphans and the poor were left to fend for themselves on the streets.

So poor Jeremiah agrees to be God's messenger to these rebellious people, to tell them to repent and return to the God of Israel. All he got for it was ridicule, scorn, and physical attacks. Despite all this mental, emotional and physical suffering he's weary of, Jeremiah still feels compelled to spread God's message. He knows God's will is right. But God's Chosen People reject it, refuse to change and wind up exiled.

This rebellion against God keeps replaying in history. It's why St. Paul tells the Romans, and us today: do not conform yourselves to this age. His words took on special meaning to me this week, because after seeing the violent images from Wisconsin, I reached my saturation point for violence and racism.

I've had it up to hear *[motion]*, not with the protests, but with the violence and racism. And then the silence to these events from certain quarters, and the unbelievable support for them from others, made me ask myself: What's happened to our American standards?

The TV images shown we're rejecting Christ's values. No matter who's on air, I see people who are self-centered, self-righteous, mean-spirited, vulgar, disrespecting each other with horrific name-calling, clinging to anger and expressing it without inhibition. Even people who say they're Christian are speaking and acting in ways that are anything but. We're losing the ability to disagree with each other without demonizing each other.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel to take up our cross and follow Him. One of those crosses is standing up for Jesus's values in our families and social circles. And that means we have to let go of our hunger for approval from others.

When we start promoting Christ's values in our families and social groups, even when His values conflict with our political party's, and both parties have their share of those, we can begin the baby steps to turn our nation from violence to civility.

Our national failings seen on TV result from not promoting Christ's values enough with our family, friends and other contacts – we may be the only ones who inform them. Promote God's values to them so they don't make a self-destructive choice. Make this world better.

If you've failed at this, I'm proof it's never too late to start. When I moved to California, I didn't know anyone. I was hungry for acceptance. Early on I sat around some discussions that eventually turned against Church teachings. I kept my mouth shut. And I was ashamed of myself for it. But very soon after, I got Jeremiah's fire in the belly, and couldn't stay silent anymore. I stood up for our values. It cost me some friendships, and I was prepared to accept that.

Let's pray to receive Jeremiah's fire in our bellies when we're with family and our other contacts, and stand up for Christ's values, of respect, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, truth, and all the others we've learned. When we're joined by other voices, we can end the anti-family behaviors we see now, like abortion, people living together without marriage, the taking away of family days by forcing people to work on Sundays or at 2 or 3 jobs, and so on.

When we stand up for God's values, we will find ourselves in Jeremiah's situation: expect some rejection, ridicule and scorn. It will cost us some friends. But we'll be able to live with ourselves. And God promises good things will come out of any loss we experience. And we won't have to hear the ultimate insult of someone saying to us, "Oh, I didn't know you were Christian."

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