

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jul 28th 2016

Jeremiah presents the image of a potter at the wheel in today's first reading. In my imagination the potter's workroom is filled with sunlight. His foot pumps the wheel in a steady rhythm. He hums a little as he shapes and reshapes the clay. It's a peaceful, meditative image. And yet, my first thought after that was, "It's not usually fun to be the clay."

Change is usually uncomfortable, even when we know it will lead to growth. It is uncomfortable because we, the clay, don't know exactly what the potter is making of us. We experience being squeezed and pressed, and we react. We can't see what we look like at most stages. Sometimes, we think we've figured it out and found a comfortable shape – and then the potter continues his work!

It can be just as difficult as it is important for us, as the clay, to trust that the potter has something beautiful in mind for us. The psalm says, "Blessed are they whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD, their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them." As far as potters go, the Creator of Everything is the most trustworthy and capable of shaping us. He doesn't just see the clay on the wheel. He sees the whole picture. If we can put our trust and hope in God, even in the midst of uncomfortable or painful change, we are blessed.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples how everything will be brought into the Kingdom, like fish in a net. Not just the good, but the bad; not just the righteous, but the wicked, too. The good is kept, the bad is not. I am inclined to read this not as good and bad or righteous and wicked people, but all the parts of ourselves. One of my favorite allegories for this is C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*. It is a series of vignettes in which people face the things, big or small, that keep them from receiving the glorious reality of heaven. Or, they choose not to face them, and leave still wrapped up in themselves. Sometimes, the very thing that once separated them is transformed into something wonderful as they "become real." The transformation is often painful, but the clay becomes something beautiful in the potter's hands.

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