

The Word Alive

lee
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It's Jeremiah time

Jeremiah, as most of us know, was not a happy camper. The authorities of his time were behaving pretty badly — claiming to be Israelites but hedging their bets with a few side offerings to the neighboring gods, kicking the poor around, stealing their neighbors blind, and generally not doing what God commanded. It was Jeremiah's job to tell these authorities to cut it out, which did not go over well, so Jeremiah got kicked around, was dropped into a cistern, and suffered all sorts of other unpleasant things. After a while, Jeremiah got fed up. And he whined.

Sometimes I'd like to whine. Don't get me wrong — I am not claiming to be Jeremiah or to have the inside track on God's will. But if Jeremiah got to whine sometimes, well, dang it, don't I get to? And right now, I am so annoyed at certain things I see happening in our churches, I just can't keep it in anymore.

At a recent lector meeting, we were talking about our ministry and I finally confessed that it gets pretty frustrating to know how to lector well and to know how to show others how to lector well but not be able to share those skills because nobody wants to listen. Our leader suggested that having better skills was not necessarily the point. I may have misunderstood what he said, but it sure sounded like he didn't care whether the lectors got better or not — that it was

more important not to ruffle anyone's feathers.

So when did mediocrity become a Christian virtue? When did making everyone feel good become more important than working together to grow?

I know I'm not alone in this. When I hear from other lector leaders, I hear the same thing. No one wants to come to rehearsal, and people are offended when you suggest that they do something differently. They tell me about lectors who get accused of being overdramatic because they read with some liveliness. I hear from other liturgists about folks at their churches whining because they don't want to "put on a show," as if the only way to be sincere is to be boring.

Sorry, gang, Mass as we frequently celebrate it in our churches *is* boring. Worse yet, the same folks who are so terrified of putting on a show are the same ones complaining that our youth don't come to church. Study after study shows that the reason the youth aren't coming is because they see nothing relevant to them. Mass is a bore and they feel closer to God on a mountaintop, with their friends, anywhere except inside a church. What does that say about us?

Worse yet, I must confess that I have been complicit in this trend toward mediocrity. A lector at our church was not following the rubrics appropriately, and this was making everyone else crazy. Did I go up to her and gently suggest she change her tactics? No. I didn't feel I had the authority, and I figured she wouldn't

listen to me anyway, but once our new deacon finally explained to her what was what, she was fine. All that angst and grumbling behind this poor woman's back, and all we had to do was be kind but straight with her.

I wish I had an answer for this. I don't. The bottom line is that there are certain folks who want to believe what they believe, whether it makes sense or not. This makes it pretty darned hard to educate them. I mean, if I already know The Truth, why should I listen to you?

If I am honest, I myself am sometimes convinced I know The Truth. I have my blind spots, but my hope is that being aware of those blind spots will help me get past them.

And there is hope. We can improve. Given that we're dealing with part of our fellow lectors' expression of their relationship with God, we have to expect that some are going to be resistant to different ideas. If we remain open to our own and others' shortcomings, with enough time and patience and love, some folks just might come around.

But I wish I had the nerve to do some screaming too, at times. I know that it seldom, if ever, does any good. So that's why, every now and then, I just gotta whine a little. Thank you for letting me do so. **ML**

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