



Lenten Reflection for Saturday, April 9th
Deacon John Musco

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

Jeremiah 20:10 - 13

For I hear many whispering: "Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. "Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him." But the Lord is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

At first reading, this passage from Jeremiah feels very alien to me. This talk of terror, denunciation, friends waiting for him to fail and get their revenge on him—what does this have to do with me? My friends may occasionally disappoint me, and I no doubt disappoint them—but waiting for me to stumble and take their revenge? What kind of friends does Jeremiah have?

To better understand him I looked at the verses that precede this passage. In those verses Jeremiah complains bitterly about the torture he is going through because God has “enticed” him to proclaim God’s message. He cannot stop himself from proclaiming the message to the rulers and the people. And it’s not a pleasant message: it’s “violence and destruction” 24/7! Who wants to hear that? Everyone is sick and tired of hearing it! Then this verse brought me up short:

*If I say, 'I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name',
then within me there is something like a burning fire
shut up in my bones;*

“Fire shut up in my bones” is, of course, the title of the memoir by Charles Blow and the acclaimed opera based on it. It’s the story of how Charles was sexually assaulted by a cousin as a child and how he struggled with his sexual identity—a part of him was attracted to men. Somehow he was “different”, somehow he did not fit in.

I see this “fire shut up in my bones” as the inner struggle many of us go through in coming to terms with our

identity and purpose, as given to us by God. For Jeremiah his purpose was to proclaim God's warning to the people. It was a tough assignment. But all of us have a tough assignment if we are to live our lives fully.

Of course, I relate to Charles Blow's story because I'm gay. As a child, I didn't understand what that meant, but I knew it made me "different", and that difference had to be hidden deep within me. I couldn't let that out and it affected my whole life. It's taken a lifetime to reveal myself, little by little. It was my liberation, and it seemed to be tied up with all the other gifts that God has given me that also had to be hidden away. All this was the "fire shut up my bones."

It has been wonderful to let these things out; something not to be ashamed of, but to celebrate. My spiritual journey has been a journey of living into my identity and purpose. As with Jeremiah and Charles, it's a tough assignment. I have a long way to go; thank God I've started.



John Musco loves serving the church as a deacon. He's looking forward to traveling with Martin to Croatia, Bosnia and Montenegro in May, their first big trip since the pandemic. He enjoys cooking, gardening and the beach.