

Lenten Reflection on Jeremiah 17:5-10: Trust in God, Not in Man

A Tale of Two Paths

Jeremiah 17:5-10 presents a stark contrast between two types of people: one who trusts in human strength and another who trusts in God. The one who relies on human power alone is compared to a dry shrub in the desert, while the one who trusts in the Lord is like a tree planted by a river, flourishing even in times of drought. The passage concludes with a warning: *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”* (Jer 17:9). God alone searches the heart and rewards each according to their deeds.

This passage challenges us, especially in Lent, to ask: Where do I place my trust? Do I rely on my own limited wisdom, or do I entrust myself to God?

Wisdom from the Fathers of the Church

The early Church Fathers saw this passage as a warning against pride and self-reliance, which separate us from God’s grace.

- **St. Augustine** taught that when we trust in man over God, we are bound to fall: *“The soul which prefers itself to God becomes like the desert; it withers away and becomes unfruitful.”* In contrast, the soul that trusts in God is nourished and fruitful.
- **St. John Chrysostom** emphasized that even the most powerful earthly rulers are nothing without God’s support. He wrote: *“He who trusts in man alone builds on sand; but he who trusts in the Lord stands on a rock.”*
- **Origen** interpreted the “deceitful heart” in verse 9 as our tendency to rationalize sin. We deceive ourselves into thinking we don’t need God’s guidance, but this self-deception leads to spiritual ruin.

Moral Principle: The Danger of Self-Reliance Without God

A core moral principle from this passage is that **absolute self-reliance without trust in God leads to spiritual dryness and destruction**. This does not mean we should not use reason or work hard, but rather that human effort apart from God is ultimately fruitless.

Modern Application: The Collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (2023)

A recent example of misplaced trust is the collapse of **Silicon Valley Bank (SVB)** in 2023. This bank was one of the most trusted financial institutions in the tech world. However, it failed because of poor risk management and an overconfidence in human calculations. Investors, executives, and entrepreneurs put their complete trust in a system that, ultimately, could not sustain itself.

Many people lost their life savings overnight. Those who had placed all their security in financial success found themselves in a spiritual and emotional desert—shaken, anxious, and without direction. This mirrors Jeremiah’s warning: *“Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength.”*

Contrast this with Christians who, even amid financial ruin, remain rooted in faith. A Catholic businessman who had invested heavily in SVB shared that while he suffered losses, he found peace

knowing that *his ultimate security was in God, not money*. He compared his experience to being a tree by the river—shaken by the storm but not uprooted.

Conclusion: A Lenten Call to Trust in God

Lent is a time to reassess where we place our trust. The world tells us to rely on power, wealth, and human intelligence alone, but these are fleeting. Instead, we are called to anchor ourselves in Christ, the source of true security.

Let us reflect:

- Do I put my ultimate trust in God, or do I rely only on human strength?
- How can I deepen my spiritual “roots” so that I remain steadfast even in trials?
- Am I allowing self-deception to lead me away from God’s truth?

This Lent, let us strive to be like the tree planted by the river—strong, unwavering, and nourished by the living water of God’s grace. 