**16 Pentecost, Sept 8, 2013, Jer 18:1-11,Ps 139, Phil 1-21,Luke 14:25-33, Rev Mary S Trainor**

In Jeremiah, the Lord said, "***Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand."*** In our Psalm, we heard ***" I am marvelously made."***

We are like clay in the divine potter's hand, and we are marvelously made! If you were asked to describe yourself in terms of a piece of pottery, what would you say? Are you rectangular or circular or round, are you tall or flat, are you the color of the earth or the color of the sky, do you have holes, are you smooth or bumpy. I have a bunch of pottery samples here to inspire you. Just look here -- there is such a huge diversity in the types of pots a potter can make! They are beautiful, and they each serve a specific function! The prophet Jeremiah's metaphor that we are clay in God's hands really connects for us; it also links up with our Psalm for today, #139, which is intimate, reflecting the closeness of God to us. The Psalm says, the Lord has ***"searched me out and known me...you know my sitting down and my rising up...my thoughts.... you press upon me behind and before, and lay your hand upon me ....you yourself created my inmost parts, you knit me together."*** God made us in His image. Each day He reforms us if we let Him -- like a potter creates new, beautiful works of art by shaping and molding. Do you see yourself, as the Psalm put it, "***marvelously made***," perfectly shaped, and painted beautiful colors? Or, do you see yourself as flat or misshapen or drab? What is are the top and sides of your clay pot like? Does it have a small top opening or is it wide open? Is it cracked or smooth, is it solid or does it have holes?

Indeed, most of us are not perfect examples of clay vessels. We have made mistakes in our lives, we have had problems; problems that affect the clay. In thinking about people who make pottery, their clay gets cracks and holes in them, they make pots that are misshapen -- but they don't give up on them: they reshape them and they smooth out the cracks and they plug the holes. God does the same for us, He remolds and smoothes us out when we mess up, if we turn to Him....that "if" is a big "if." God gave us free will, and the way of the world is to turn lots of places when we mess up, and only turn to God as a last resort. Oh yes, we do use our free will - and God allows this! We, as it says in our Jeremiah reading, can choose to do "***evil in His sight, not listening to His voice***." In spite of our bad choices, God doesn't stop having His hand upon us. But his healing and remolding comes when we make the choice to go to God. As the potter, God treasures us, as the work of His hands, all the time--but He is especially pleased when we chose Him.

Our Gospel today is about the challenge of making the choice daily to put God first in our lives; this is a tough lesson. The first thing this Gospel lesson tells us is that every person who claims to be Christian will at some point hear the voice of Christ asking -- *"***Have you considered very carefully what it means to be a follower of mine?****Do you recognize it is not easy, there is a cost."**Jesus is not saying to hate our family members. Rather, He is saying that we need to put Him first above all else; we need to love Him more, above all else. Every day, as we are being held, we are to go to God first for our molding, making choices that are consistent with God's will.

What happens to a lot of us, however, is that one day, we wake up and find that we have taken our relationship with God for granted. The clay pot of our lives is cracked or we have filled ourselves with all kinds of things and people -- but not so much of God. We get busy, and our choices begin to be made with God somewhere down the line. We don't live making choices with the knowledge that we were made by God for a purpose; just as each piece of pottery has a specific function, we each have a God-given purpose. In today's Gospel, Jesus cautions us against living with the wrong things at the center. We might realize this has happened in us if we look back and see we are living with the consequences of a bad decision; or we might realize it if we feel down, empty, or unfulfilled -- in spite of things going well in our lives. When we go through our lives choosing to be shaped and renewed by the hands of the Almighty, we will be who we were made to be, as His disciples. The reward is the best: being new creations in Christ with abundant, fulfilled lives here on earth and the sure and certain hope of spending eternity with Him. God has already done and is doing His part, but we have to do our part: making the tough decision to live as disciples, in spite of the fact that it is not easy.

Oh yes, it is football time -- and we are all excited about another winning season for the Packers! They are playing the 49ers at 3:25 this afternoon. Speaking of football, I want to tell you about the famous Texas football coach, who died back in the year 2000: Tom Landry. Landry is ranked as one of the best and most innovative coaches in the history of the NFL. During his 29 years of coaching the Dallas Cowboys, the team had 20 consecutive years of winning! What a record! You might have known this fact, but I imagine you did not know some other things about him. He was an engineer and a veteran of World War II; his brother died in Pearl Harbor, one of his trademarks was a fedora hat. Oh these things are important, but to Landry none of these were as important as his faith: he was a deeply religious man. His faith in God was his priority, and it came before all else -- even football! Because he taught Sunday School at his church every Sunday, he sometimes arrived at Sunday games after the noon kickoff! Landry lived his faith. A few days after winning one of the hard fought Superbowls, Landry said this in an interview, "**The overwhelming emotion among the players on the team was how empty that goal was.** They were left with the sense that **there must be something more’**” Landry then said confidently to the interviewer, "**That more** they are looking **for is a daily walk with Jesus, in which He is our Lord and Master and we are His disciples**," following in His footsteps.

We are all called to be disciples. You were marvelously made, shaped by the loving hands of the divine Potter, God. God gave you free will to make your own choices; you can choose to ignore His voice. But, you were made with a purpose, to make God's love known. So, you are called to listen to Him, to be God's disciple. Chose to live every day looking to God first. The Lord said, "***Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand,"*** you are ***" marvelously made."*** Amen.