

## TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*Gospel: Luke 12:49-53*

Jesus said to his disciples,

“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

### REFLECTION 1:

### A TIME FOR DECISION

Back in the 1930s and 40s, the Ink Spots quartet rose to prominence with their songs such as ‘If I didn’t care’, and ‘Don’t get around much anymore’. One of their greatest hits was ‘I don’t want to set the world on fire’. And the second line of the song explained the title: ‘I just want to start a flame in your heart’. When Jesus told his disciples, ‘I have come to set the world on fire’, he was talking about setting the world on fire with the love of God. He wanted to kindle a flame in our hearts. Like lightening from the sky, sparking the start of a great forest fire, Jesus challenges us to be on fire for the Lord.

Today’s Gospel (Luke 12: 49-53) brings us face to face with a paradox of Christian faith. Though Jesus came to proclaim the kingdom of God and was himself the Prince of Peace, he brought division and conflict as well. Committing ourselves to the Kingdom and walking in God’s way may bring us into conflict too – just as it got Jeremiah thrown into a well in today’s first reading [Jer. 38]. True discipleship is a costly thing.

The fact is that there are going to be times when it is not going to be easy to abide by the principles of our faith. There are going to be times when we will discover that the keeping of our beliefs will be the cause of divisions and even some strong opposition. That is what Christ is saying to us in the Gospel. None of this should come as a surprise to us. There are going to be times when we have got to stand firm for what we believe. The only way we will be able to do this will be if we believe and know in our hearts that to follow Jesus is not just a means towards salvation but rather salvation itself.

One of the greatest reasons why the Romans hated Christianity is because it tore families apart. Over and over again people had to decide whether they loved their families more than they loved Christ. The essence of Christianity is that loyalty to Christ has to take precedence over the strongest loyalties on this earth. We must be prepared to count all things but loss for the excellence of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus speaks of a baptism he must undergo he is of course referring to his Passion and Death and the restraint he is under until that time comes. That sounds like Christ complaining – a very human trait, yet one that can give us a personal experience of God. Surely to complain to God is to enter in some way into a relationship with Him. To speak to Him, is to believe somewhere in our hearts that He loves us. What we have to acknowledge is a Christ who is with us in our moments of anxiety, in our moments of worry about events we must face or a time in our lives we must endure. Jesus recognises and realises within himself the inner conflict that we all experience and how great is the consolation of knowing that

He was walked this path before us and will now walk with us. He will lead us along a path of fresh hope, and new life and finally through the cross of Calvary to resurrection.

## **REFLECTION 2:**

## **NEVER GIVE UP!**

Have you ever suffered for your faith? Has any harm come to you because you believe in Jesus? At this very moment, there are Christians being tortured and killed because they dared to admit that they are believers. According to the book 'Stories of those who stood for Jesus', there has been more Christian martyrs in modern times than there were at the peak of persecution in the Roman Empire. News reports indicate that the numbers of those who are dying for their faith have increased steadily. Their stories have the power to feed our faith and fire our zeal if we both listen and learn.

Jeremiah's story is told in today's first reading. Because he dared to speak an unpopular truth to a hostile people, he was thrown into a cistern and left to die. In the second reading the author of Hebrews tells of the martyrdom of Jesus and encourages readers to be steadfast in their struggle against evil. The Lucan gospel (Lc. 12:49-53) presents Jesus as a revolutionary who has come to set the world ablaze and be a source of division. Each of these readings assure us that faith is a fight for truth, for justice, for mercy and fidelity before God. In the 1970s Communist soldiers in Asia shot a 16-year-old girl for refusing to space on the Bible. Now, almost every week, media reports include the horrors being perpetrated by self-acclaimed religious groups like Boko Haram, Al Shahab, ISIS and the like. Just when it seems it can get no worse, it does - Nice last month saw the massacre of the innocents. How do we cope? How do we survive? How can we help to repair and renew so much that seems broken and doomed?

Today, dire situations are commonplace in many parts of our world. Refugees are being refused, immigrants are turned away. The toll of human suffering is overwhelming in places like Syria, Yemen, Chad, Sudan, Afghanistan to name only a handful. But we as believers, know for certain that goodness will never be overcome by evil. It may seem that evil has the upper hand at times, but it will not prevail. Therefore, we hope, so that all God's people will know peace. Perhaps we have an image from the world of nature, we see in David Attenborough's 'The Hunters', how prey struggle with their predators, the antelope struggling in the cheetah's claws, a frog struggling in the pelican's beak - they never give up!

We also remember that we are never alone. The faithful who have gone before us and are united for all eternity in Jesus are a constant renewable source for those of us who still struggle. St Paul has a powerful message for all of us, 'For our present troubles are quite small and won't last long. Yes, they produce for us an immeasurable great glory, so we don't look at the troubles.... rather we look forward to what we have not yet seen....the joys that come and last forever (2 Cor. 4: 17-18). Never give up!