

20th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE C

Jeremiah 38: 4-6, 8-10 + Psalm 40 + Hebrews 12: 1-4 + Luke 12: 49-53

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: August 18, 2019

Jesus is a man on fire, on fire with the redeeming love of God
Jesus burns with a profound passion to establish the Reign of God,
a kingdom of justice and peace.

A kingdom where peace is the fruit of justice,
where all God's people live in right relationship with each other.
Jesus is so consumed with love of His heavenly Father
and with a desire for all of his heavenly Father's children to live in peace,
that he is willing to be baptized in his own blood poured forth from the cross.

The fire of Jesus' love brings warmth to those whose hearts have grown cold in despair.
The fire of Jesus' love brings light to those who walk in the darkness of suffering.
The fire of Jesus' love purifies hearts that have grown hard with indifference and apathy.

Jesus' words and life are meant to call people, all people, to repentance.
Remember, to repent does not mean feeling sorry but to change the way you think.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ constantly challenges us to change the way we think
about ourselves, others, and God.
Division happens not because of Jesus or his message,
but because of the effects of what he does and says.

People are challenged to make a choice---
I will change the way I think, and so change the way I live and love OR I will not.
This is where the division comes in, as some choose to follow Jesus, to learn from him,
to grow in their understanding of what is required of them to live as children of God.
Then there are those who refuse to listen, who refuse to change their minds,
who even plan and plot his death.

From the time Jesus was born, he was a threat to those in power, as the Holy Family fled
as refugees into Egypt, escaping the murderous intents of King Herod.
As an adult, Jesus tells Pilate, "*I came into the world to testify to the truth,*" (Jn. 18:37)
and then he is tortured and killed for doing so.

To live the Gospel message, to establish the reign of justice and peace, is challenging. We face opposition from others who resist our efforts at bringing about the Kingdom of God.

It can be difficult to be merciful and kind in a culture which encourages retribution and revenge.

We do separate ourselves from others, we are divided from them, when we disturb them with the tough love of kindness and the humble deeds of mercy.

The first followers of Jesus struggled to put Jesus' teachings into practice. Remember back when we began this journey to Jerusalem in Luke's Gospel, when he wanted to pass through a Samaritan town, but the Samaritans there would not allow him passage.

Recall the reaction of James and John---

"Lord, do you want to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" (cf Lk 9: 52-56)

Jesus rebuked the Sons of Thunder who wanted to call down lightning upon their enemies, and instead they went peacefully on to another town.

It can be exhausting to work for peace in a world that glorifies violence.

The peace of Jesus Christ is much more than the absence of war---

it is when all people live in right relationship to each other, when the goods of the earth are shared justly so that no longer a few hold onto most of the world's wealth.

Recall Jesus' inaugural address in Luke's Gospel:

"I have come to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind."
(cf Lk. 4:18)

Those who benefit from the status quo, from the way things are, do not want to see how they have to change.

They would rather remain blind, refusing to recognize Christ in the stranger and the oppressed, in the poor and the powerless.

Jesus came into conflict with those who exploited the weak and the poor.

His dream of all people being welcome in the Kingdom of God brought him into conflict with the narrow minded and the bigoted.

Promoting and defending the dignity of every human life is exhausting in a culture of death.

Responding to vengeance with forgiveness is challenging.

Working for that peace which is the full fruit of justice is a tiring task.

But we are invited to persevere in running this race of faith and to not give up hope.

One Saturday morning back when I was a college freshman I entered a 3 mile race. The race began on a steep hill right outside my dorm room.

I sprinted down that hill and for the first mile or so I was staying with the leaders of the race.

But then a little while after mile one I felt as if my lungs were on fire and my legs felt like lead.

I could not keep running.

I started walking, trudging along with my head down, wondering how I was going to finish the race.

A little kid came running by me and shouted out—

“Come on mister, you can finish the race.”

His words gave new life to my legs and fresh breath to my lungs.

I started to run again, and I did finish the race.

God sends people into our lives who encourage us to persevere in running the race of faith, especially when we are tired and worn out, especially when we grow weary and lose heart.

God sends people here on earth, as well as those who have gone before us to heaven.

They encourage us by their prayers and their love to keep on keeping on.

They are the great cloud of witnesses, who surround us each day, and urge us on.

All of them say, *“Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.”* (cf Hebrews 12:2)

So we lift up our heads and realize the One Who is the Way Forward is with us.

The One who is the Truth of the Father’s love has not abandoned us, but walks by our side.

The One who is Life itself will lead us through every death to new life.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi