

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time – August 17, 2025 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

In those days, the princes said to the king: "Jeremiah ought to be put to death; he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such things to them; he is not interested in the welfare of our people, but in their ruin." King Zedekiah answered: "He is in your power"; for the king could do nothing with them. And so they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Prince Malchiah, which was in the quarters of the guard, letting him down with ropes. There was no water in the cistern, only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud.

Ebed-melech, a court official, went there from the palace and said to him: "My lord king, these men have been at fault in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah, casting him into the cistern. He will die of famine on the spot, for there is no more food in the city." Then the king ordered Ebed-melech the Cushite to take three men along with him, and draw the prophet Jeremiah out of the cistern before he should die.

Psalm: Ps 40:2, 3, 4, 18

R. (14b) Lord, come to my aid!

I have waited, waited for the LORD,
and he stooped toward me.

R. Lord, come to my aid!

The LORD heard my cry.
He drew me out of the pit of destruction,
out of the mud of the swamp;
he set my feet upon a crag;
he made firm my steps.

R. Lord, come to my aid!

And he put a new song into my mouth,
a hymn to our God.
Many shall look on in awe
and trust in the LORD.

R. Lord, come to my aid!

Though I am afflicted and poor,
yet the LORD thinks of me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
O my God, hold not back!

R. Lord, come to my aid!

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 12:1-4

Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

Gospel: Luke 12:49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.

From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

I was sitting on a screened-in porch in Wisconsin during my yearly retreat. I was listening to the delicious, drenching sounds of a huge rain, splattering, slapping the earth. But why so huge? It surely must have been well intentioned, but then why so able to hurt? Without question such a storm would beat us down if we dared to go outside. If its violence was caused mainly by the need to bring water out of the skies and into the earth as fast as possible, did it have any intention of harming anything? I feel a twinge of fright, especially for St. Louis, where immense rain has been causing flooding. That night, the rain ignored my question. In fact it redoubled its efforts. Its huge sound got more huge, like a swell of applause. Nice going, it was saying. I knew something was trying to give goodness for the hitherto tough earth. Comfort sighed deep within this tender, rough pounding. Huge branches bowed their heads to receive the cleansing and nourishment. Why so furious? If sweetly intended, then why so able to hurt? Is "tough love" what keeps our planet in bloom? How long will this poor planet last? Hopkins addressed God as "Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung: Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then." *

Jesus headed into such a "dark descending" in this Sunday's Gospel. He was heading toward Jerusalem. He loved her and her people, and wanted to shower abundance upon them, in the same way that the rain desired that night. But he knew with increasing certainty that Jerusalem would place him—not merely down a cistern as the soldiers did Jeremiah, not just outside the gates and walls—but right straight into the jaws of death. It will be a baptism, he says, and he wants it. He shouts to his disciples that he has come to set the earth on fire, blazing like lightning! "How great is my anguish until it is accomplished," he says. He is filled with the Spirit of God and he cannot wait to let it flow. But at the same time this Spirit knows that he must stand inside the horrible downpour. He must not run away. He will walk relentlessly into a storm that had by no means reached its peak. No wonder he was distraught. Love, rather than being just sweetness and light, consists also of the dark and pounding rain. The people will say a vigorous NO to him. Alright, think of the First Reading. There, Jeremiah was quite explicitly "stuck in the mud." He had foretold events too truly and too many times. The princes threw him into an empty cistern with just enough mud into which he would sink. How could he prophesy from there? And how could Jesus speak God's Word from a criminal's cross? Down it rained, rained, that night. Suddenly I saw a single lamp across the lake, shining through it all. A porch-light of welcome! My soul found some relief. But as I concentrated, the lamp surrendered itself as just an old, white piece of leaf that had caught itself on my screen. Its light came from my lamp. So I played a game. I shifted my eyes up on the screen and it was a lantern. I looked down and it was only a remnant of leaf-life. Back, forth. Which was it really? I took comfort, since, of course, it was both. Christ makes a home of both the near and the far away. Bless God..

* Hopkins, The Wreck of the Deutschland

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Jeremiah was a prophet thrown into a cistern to die for speaking out against the waging of war. Can you think of people in the present time that were/are treated the same way for speaking out against injustice? Are people listening now to those holding out against racism and climate change?
2. What is the "cloud of witnesses" Paul refers to? What does everyone in the "cloud" have in common with the others? Do you have favorites in this cloud? Did everyone in the "cloud" keep his/her eyes on Jesus?
3. According to this Gospel reading, what did Jesus come to earth to do? What is the "fire" he wants the earth consumed by? Will part of that fire consume you?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following prayer:

O God, who have prepared for those who love you good things which no eye can see, fill our hearts, we pray, with the warmth of your love, so that, loving you in all things and above all things, we may attain your promises, which surpass every human desire. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

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Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen