**Homily for the 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time [C] (Aug 14-2025)**

**Readings:-Jer 38:4-6, 8-10; Heb 12:1-4; Lk 12: 49-53**

**My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ;**

The central theme of today’s readings is that we should courageously live out our religious convictions and principles in our lives, as Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus did, even if doing so should result in our martyrdom and turn society upside down. If no one is ever offended by the quality of our commitment to Christ, then perhaps we are practicing “inoffensive Christianity.”

**Courage to confront:** In the 1920s, an English adventurer named Mallory led an expedition to conquer Mount Everest. His first, second, and even his third attempt with an experienced team met with failure. Upon his return to England, the few who had survived held a banquet to salute Mallory and those who had perished. As he stood up to speak, he looked around he saw picture frames of himself and those who had died. Then he turned his back on the crowd and faced a large picture of Mount Everest looming large like an unbeatable giant. With tears streaming down his face, he spoke to the mountain on behalf of his dead friends: “I speak to you Mt. Everest, in the name of all brave men living, and those yet unborn. Mt. Everest, you defeated us once, you defeated us twice; you defeated us three times. But Mt. Everest, we shall someday defeat you, because you can’t get any bigger, but we can.” –Today’s Scripture challenges us to confront the world with prophetic courage of our Christian convictions (John Rose in *John’s Sunday Homilies*).

**The lessons from the Scripture Readings summarized:-** Jeremiah, in our first reading, is presented as experiencing the consequences of the burning word of God within him. Jeremiah’s preaching divided the city and incited such opposition that people sought his death. He showed the courage of his prophetic conviction by telling the king that he had to surrender to the mighty army of Babylonian empire to save Israel. The result was that Jeremiah was thrown into a deep, muddy unused cistern to die for his “treason.” The refrain for today’s Responsorial Psalm (Ps 40), has us sing what could have been Jeremiah’s plea to God, *“****Lord! Come to my aid!”*** Standing in this prophetic tradition, Paul, in the second reading, challenges the Judeo-Christians to stand firm in their Faith in Jesus, ignoring the ostracism imposed on them by their own former Jewish community.

**In today’s Gospel,** Jesus, too, preaches the word of God which continues to divide families, a word which, he knew, would lead ultimately to his death. The fire Jesus brings is the fire of love and the fire of hope. The disruption, division, and revolution, which Jesus and his true followers cause in society by the fire of sacrificial love and the fire of justice, are necessary to re-set what’s fractured, put right what’s dislocated and cleanse what’s infected. In other words, the curative pain caused by Jesus’ ideas and ideals is necessary for the establishment of real *shalom* of God. Even though Jesus brings a sword and causes division, he is the bringer of true and lasting peace. In pursuing his mission, Jesus brings division because some follow him and others oppose him. We must make a decision to follow him or not, to share his “baptism” or not. This choice can result in division, even within families.

 **Important reflections and messages for our personal life:#1:** **Let us learn to appreciate** the contemporary prophets in the Church: The Jesuit Cardinal Avery Dulles, writing about the role of prophecy in the modern Church communities in his book *Models of the Church,* remarks: “Christianity is not healthy unless there is room in it for prophetic protest against abuses of authority.” God continues to send such prophets to every parish community, and it is the duty of the bishop, pastor, and parish council to listen to the well-intended, constructive criticisms of such Jeremiahs.

**# 2: We should have fire in our hearts:** On the day of our Baptism, we received the light of Christ and were instructed to keep that torch burning brightly until the return of Christ Jesus. In addition, the Holy Spirit was sent into our hearts at Confirmation to help set us on fire. “*One who is on fire cannot sit on a chair.”* So, as Christians on fire, we have to inflame people to care, to serve, and to bless one another with all the gifts of Faith. We should allow that fire to burn off the impurities in us and to bring out the purity of the gold and silver within us.

**Gospel exegesis:** Today’s Gospel passage consists of two sections: in the first section (vv 49-50), Jesus speaks of his Divine destiny to endure suffering, and in the second section (vv 51-53), he prophesies the breakup of families resulting from his message.  Jesus explains his Divine destiny by highlighting his role of “*setting the earth on fire”* and being “*baptized”*in the waters of suffering.  The images of fire and baptism refer to his mission, both in terms of the cost that it will exact from him and the decision it will require of people.

**“I have come to*‘set the earth on fire*.'”**In the Bible, fire is sometimes symbolic of purification (for example, Nm 31:23; Ez 22:19-22), and, more often, is associated with God’s judgment (for example, Jdt 16:17; Is 66:16; Am 7:4; 2 Pt 3:7).  The image of fire is also used to symbolize God’s glory (Ez 1:4, 13), His protective presence (2 Kgs 6:17), His holiness (Dt 4:24), His righteous judgment (Zec 13:9), and His wrath against sin (Is 66:15-16).  The image of fire is also used of the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11 and Acts 2:3).  Fire has many characteristics: it warms, purifies, refines, transforms, and burns.  As a purifying force, fire burns up what is useless and refines what is impure besides giving warmth and energy.  Elijah brought the fire of judgment on the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:36-40) and the soldiers of King Ahaziah (2 Kgs 1:10-14).  John the Baptist promises that Jesus “*will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”*(Mt 3:11), and that promise was fulfilled at Pentecost.  James and John wanted to call down fire from Heaven upon the Samaritans who rejected Jesus, but Jesus would not permit it (Lk 9:54).  We are also reminded of the prophet’s words, “*For he is like a refiner’s fire*…” (Mal 3:2).  The fire burns hot, removing impurities and leaving only that which is desirable.  These meanings suggest that the fire which Jesus brings will consume or purify the world.  However, it is also possible that he means that his baptism will be a baptism of fire.  In the Aramaic language the word translated as “earth” can also mean “earth-oven,” the common stove in Mediterranean villages, heated by burning dried and salted camel-dung patties.  The salt in the dried camel dung acted as a catalyst keeping fire burning for a long time.  In that sense, Jesus acts as a catalyst in his believers’ life. “Fire was to be an expected aspect of discipleship in the sense that: (1) baptism into Jesus dying and rising necessarily included a process of *purification* by his word and the Holy Spirit; (2) those who align themselves with him who is both LIGHT and TRUTH will inevitably know the heat of *persecution*; (3) the service of the good news will require a *zeal* so contagious that it will set fire in the hearts of others.” (Sanchez Files).

 **“*I must be baptized with a baptism:”*** The cup and baptism are metaphors for Jesus’ suffering and death when Jesus asks James and John, “*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with*?’ What Jesus means by his question and challenge is “I have a terrible experience through which I must pass, and my life is full of tension until I pass through it and emerge triumphantly from it; are you willing and able you do the same?” Our Baptism is an immersion in Christ’s death in which we die to sin and are reborn to the new life of grace: *“We were indeed buried with him through Baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life”(Rom 6:4).* In the same way, our Eucharistic celebration is a recollection of Jesus’ sacrificial baptism (immersion) in suffering, and death, and the anguish these caused him, not simply a celebration of the community with the risen Christ and with other believers.

***“I have come to establish division on earth, not peace.”*** As Jesus walked the road to Jerusalem, the disciples had to decide whether to go with him or not.  To be with or against Jesus is a decision which has the effect of judgment and division. Even though Christ did come to establish peace between God and man, that peace causes a division between those who accept it and those who reject it. In this way he becomes a sign of contradiction ([CCC 575-576](http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/catechism/index.html#165)). Since Luke emphasizes peace as the gift that Jesus brings (1:79; 2:14; 19:38), we are shocked when Jesus declares that he has come not to bring peace on earth but division, splitting even families apart.  Jesus’ teaching caused division in families, in communities, and in the Church.  For the Palestinian Jews of the first century, a person’s place in the family conferred personal identity, protection, a support system, and a place in the community.  To separate oneself from one’s family or clan was, literally, a matter of life and death.  But Christianity tore families in two, because a follower of Christ had to decide which he loved better — his kith and kin or Christ.  In Christianity, the loyalty to Christ has to take precedence over the dearest loyalties of this earth. Belief in Jesus and commitment to him cause fires of arguments to erupt between believers and non-believers in the same family or community, resulting in the division of families and conflict in society.  Standing up for what is right and working for justice and truth are higher aims than unity, and working for those aims will sometimes cause division.  Hence, Christians today may cause division and rouse opposition because they share, through their Baptism, the prophetic charism of speaking God’s word, no matter how unpopular, and of giving a voice to those who have no one to speak for them.  Let us remember that Jesus’ sense of justice brought him into conflict with those who exploited the weak and the poor.  His integrity invited confrontation with the dishonest and hypocritical leaders, and his love for the poor, for sinners and for the outcast alienated him from the narrow-minded and self-righteous. C.S. Lewis once said that the Gospel was concerned to create “new people” not just “nice people.”

 **JOKE Of the Week:-01)“Who is in the Penthouse?”** A holy pastor of a very large parish died and went to Heaven. He was convinced that he would get the penthouse in Heaven. *”If not I, then who?“*he thought, not so humbly, to himself. Instead, he was given a   tiny one-bedroom apartment. Disappointed and not a little angry, the preacher asked St. Peter why he couldn’t have the penthouse. St. Peter replied, “*We have lots of pastors and preachers like you here in Heaven, and the conveniences in your apartment surpass everything available to the rich and famous people on earth.”* *“Then who is in the penthouse?”* the pastor demanded. *“It’s a lawyer,”* replied St. Peter. *“What?! Why?!”* Peter replied, “*Until now, we haven’t had one here!”*

**Additional anecdotes:01)** ) **The Truth Teller:** Many years ago, a certain Greenland Eskimo was brought to New York City for a short visit. He was filled with wonder at all the miracles of sight and sound in New York City. When he returned to his native village he told his people the stories of a building that rose into the very face of the sky; of the street cars, which he described as houses which moved along the trail, of the mammoth bridges, artificial lights and all the dazzling things of the metropolitan city. Many of the people could not believe him. Those who did not believe him looked at him coldly and walked away. The villagers called him a liar. He carried that name, “the liar,” to his grave. — The road of the truth-teller has always been rocky. As a result of telling God’s truth according to His command, many of the prophets were killed. Jeremiah died at the hands of his own people. Socrates who led people to truth through reason, was sentenced to die by drinking poison. Jesus was crucified. St. Stephen was stoned. Bruno was burned. Mahatma Gandhi, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Archbishop Saint Oscar Romero were shot to death. The decision to follow Christ can meet harsh rejection. In 2004, Sister Helen Prejean, a prison chaplain at Stewardship Conference in New Orleans, wrote a book, *Dead Man Walking,* which became an Oscar-winning movie. Sister. Helen sought reconciliation between prisoners on death row and their victims’ families. She met with harsh words and actions. — Taking a stand and telling the truth often invites division and opposition. You are either for or against Jesus. There is no comfortable way of following Jesus! (John Pichappilly in *The Table of the Word*; quoted by Fr. Botelho)**.**

**02)For he shall give his angels charge over thee:”** Jimmy Stewart was one of Hollywood’s most loved and most respected actors. According to all accounts, Stewart’s character and integrity were by products of being raised by loving and honourable parents. He himself once wrote of his father’s wise and loving advice to him before Jimmy went off to fight in World War II. In a letter, Alex Stewart wrote, “My dear Jim boy, soon after you read this letter, you will be on your way to the worst sort of danger . . . I am banking on the enclosed copy of the 91st Psalm. The thing that takes the place of fear and worry is the promise of these words . . . I can say no more . . . I love you more than I can tell you. Dad.” Part of the 91st Psalm reads, *“For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.”* [J. Allen Nudge with Marge Van Kirk, “The Boy Next Door,” *McCall’s* (January, 1998) p. 38.] — This is the proper antidote to the anxiety that many of us feel in this turbulent world in which we live. God is with us regardless of what the future may bring. What we need to do is to regain our connection to God. We need to focus less on our financial resources for security and more on the Rock of ages. Read the signs of the times. They will tell you we need God more than ever before.

**03) Jeremiah ought to be put to death:**On January 11, 1983, a couple of teen-age lads left a morning tutorial class at School No. 5 in Rochester, New York, drank three quarts of beer, and then stumbled back to gym class. Peter A. Castle, one of the seven tutors of this “hard-core” inner-city public school program, saw the pair come in and seized one of them by the arm. They were breaking the rules of the program, he said, so they must go home. The lad that Castle was confronting refused, drew out a knife and stabbed Peter in the heart. Castle slumped to the ground. “I told him not to mess with me,” the youth cried out. The victim was taken to the hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival. Teachers of inner-city problem youths assume a task full of risks. Peter Castle, 31, was ideally fitted for the job. He was 6 feet 4 inches and a born athlete. In fact, after high school he was drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates for their baseball team. But he had chosen to go on to college where he specialized in sociology and social welfare, He was married, but as yet had no children of his own. Pete’s chief virtue was his compassion for others. Typically, he had been one of the organizers of this tutorial program in which there was one tutor for every five or six kids. The rules of attendance and discipline were necessarily strict. But Castle knew that it was the personal relationship that counted. A hug and “I love you” did more than any tongue-lashing. Most of the youngsters appreciate this, and wept when Peter died. Barbara Vancheri, a reporter for *The Democrat and Chronicle*quoted the program supervisor on this point: “The problem with these kids is nobody ever really cared. Peter cared.” — The prophet, Jeremiah, also really cared for the fellow Israelites to whom God sent him as a prophet to remind them constantly of the Divine law. But as today’s first reading tells us, those who did not want to be reminded of God’s law rose up against the prophet and imprisoned him. Luckily, Jeremiah was not killed. But it will never be thus. Too often the good were hated and treated violently, possibly because of their goodness. Loving one’s neighbour is the riskiest of the commandments.( Father Robert F. McNamara)