



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, that commitment may not be authentic, and if our individual and communal living of the Good News casts no fire and causes no division, then perhaps we are practicing "inoffensive Christianity." Each of these readings assures us that faith is a fight for truth, for justice, for mercy and for obedience to God.

Outline of Today's Readings:

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.

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.

How wonderful it would be if following Jesus was easy. When we stand for what is right or speak the truth, how great it would be to be greeted by applause. But this is not the world in which we live. So Jesus is telling us today that if we wish to assist him in building the kingdom of God, if we wish to contribute to making the world better and more just, then we cannot be afraid of fire.

Keeping the Peace/Faith or Serving the Peace/Faith:

There are difficult words from Jesus in today's gospel. He wishes to set the earth on fire. He speaks against peace. As we try to make sense of Jesus' words in the gospel, an important distinction should be held in mind: the difference between **keeping the peace and serving the peace.**

Christians are called not to keep the peace but to serve the peace. If we make keeping the peace our highest priority, we will never allow ourselves to upset or disturb anyone. We will always be inclined to maintain the status quo and afraid to rock the boat. Such an approach runs the risk of covering over the injustice and evil that are present among us. When it tolerates evil, keeping the peace is contrary to God's kingdom.

If we make keeping the peace our highest priority, we will never permit ourselves to say that a particular relationship is abusive, and we need to change it. We will never face the reality that our marriage is destructive and walk away from it. If keeping the peace is our highest priority, we will never have the courage to confront a family member about his or her alcoholism or speak out about verbal or sexual abuse in the workplace.

We are not called to keep the peace. We are called to serve the peace. Now, of course, this does not mean that making people angry is somehow valuable in itself. Upsetting people is often unwise and counterproductive. But in a world where evil exists, opposition and confrontation are sometimes necessary to serve the peace. We might be called to serve the peace by marching against an unjust law or an unjust war. We might be called to serve the peace by standing against someone in authority who ignores the rights of another. We might be called to serve the peace by speaking the truth in our family, in our workplace, or in our church—even if speaking the truth makes waves and risks division.

Are you serving the peace or are you keeping the peace? That is a crucial question. If we end up covering over evil in an effort to keep the peace, we will in time be living a lie. And that lie will, in the end, destroy us. But if we can, with prudence and strength, oppose the evil that surrounds us, we will be serving the peace. Our efforts to confront evil are, of course, playing with

fire. But when we light a fire to destroy the forces opposed to God's Kingdom, Jesus would say, "Let it burn!"

Satan has three lines of attack. First, he tries to keep men from becoming Christians. Then, if stopped here, he tries to keep them from being active and useful as Christians. And finally, as a last resort, he tries to destroy their character.

God's Prophets and Persecution by serving the Peace/Faith in the World:

God sends His prophets to give the world His message in every century and fight against Satan. Saint Oscar Romero, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, Pope St. John Paul II, Nelson Mandela, were all twentieth-century prophets who had the courage of their Christian convictions to follow Jesus and proclaim his undiluted message which *cast fire on earth* and caused healthy *division* in the society as today's Gospel points out. Archbishop Saint Oscar Romero who sided with the poor, exploited farmworkers, declared: *"If they kill all your priests and the bishop too, each one of you must become God's microphone, each one of you must become a prophet. I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people."* Today's readings remind us that the Church needs prophets like Romero and they caution contemporary prophets that their course will not be easy.

The toll of human suffering is overwhelming in places like Syria, Yemen, Chad, Nigeria, Ghana, Sudan, Egypt, Kenya, Turkey, Ethiopia, Somalia, India, Algeria, Libya, Afghanistan, Greece, France, Belgium ... In India, like in many countries in the world, Christians have been attacked, beaten and threatened by Hindu radicals throughout rural areas in India, often falsely accused of trying to forcefully convert other believers. The mob of 300 or so radicals destroyed a shed near the worship building before descending upon children in a Sunday school class. "They took away the Bible storybooks and some song and activity books from the children and tore them into pieces," Pastor Raj told Morning Star News in a piece published on Wednesday. "I'm ready to become martyr for Christ," the pastor said. "Until my Lord provides us a building, we will continue serving the Lord. It is fine even if we do not have shelter, we will not stop worshiping Him. We are ready to die for Christ." "They scared the children away by telling them that they will be beaten up if they are seen in the church premises ever again." Again Fr. Thomas Chellan, director of Social Service Centre and Sr. Meena, his assistant, who were serving the villages and fighting for the rights for women, were tortured dragged and mishandled. Mr. Steyn and his two sons were burnt alive.

Have we ever suffered for our faith? Has any harm come to us because we believe in Jesus? At this very moment, there are Christians in different parts of the World being tortured and killed because they dared to admit that they are believers and serving the

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. *"He 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.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, set my heart on fire with the brightness of Your love and mercy and give me the courage to live always according to your value system even though it may be very costly.

Jesus, I Trust In You.