



August 17, 2025

## Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*"I have come to set the earth on fire..." Luke 12:49*



Dear Friends

This August we mark the eightieth anniversary of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There was a memorial Mass at the Cathedral in Nagasaki. Pope Leo offered a message of respect to the *hibakusha* (survivors of the atomic bombings) and to pray for peace *"a prayer that must never end."*

The pope said that Hiroshima and Nagasaki *"remain living reminders of the profound horrors wrought by nuclear weapons."* Denouncing nuclear weapons he continued, *"True peace demands laying down of weapons—especially those with the power to cause an indescribable catastrophe. Nuclear arms offend our shared humanity and also betray the dignity of creation, whose harmony we are called to safeguard."* We can never morally justify the targeting of civilians whether it was in Japan, or today in the Ukraine or Gaza. As Pope Francis often said, *"War is always a defeat for humanity."*

Each of our readings assures us that faith is a struggle for truth, for justice, for mercy, for peace, and for obedience to God. That struggle will put us at odds with others. At times some will have to face persecution and even death. As believers we know that goodness will never be overcome by evil. At times it seems evil has the upper hand, but it will not prevail. We are not alone. As the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, the faithful who have gone before us and are united to Christ Jesus, are a constant resource for those who are still in the struggle. The author calls them *"a great cloud of witnesses."*

Jeremiah is one of those witnesses. He proclaimed an unpopular truth to people who refused to listen. His unwavering prophetic message was that Judah should surrender to Babylon and live, rather than resist and die. This ran counter to governmental policy and was considered treason. Jeremiah believed this was the will of God. While on the surface the face-off was between Jeremiah and King Zedekiah, it was clearly the advisors who wielded the power. They persuaded the king to let them throw Jeremiah to the bottom of a cistern to die of neglect.

One court official sympathetic to Jeremiah's message successfully convinces the king to reverse the condemnation. Jeremiah was freed from the pit, and his challenging unpatriotic message will continue to be heard. The leaders refused to listen. The military resistance was futile. They never had a chance to defeat their enemy. Jerusalem and the Temple were completely destroyed. All the people were deported.

Jeremiah's prophetic message stirred up discord. This is exactly what Jesus says his own message will occasion in our passage from Luke. Jesus makes it clear that there can be no neutrality regarding his words and works. The challenge of his teachings will meet opposition and hostility from those who refuse to accept truth.

Fire was a sign of God's presence. Fire has destructive potential but also purifies. Gold is purified by fire. Because of its ability to purify fire was a symbol of God's activity. The Day of the Lord is associated with the purging fire of God's love. When Jesus desires to ignite a fire, he is saying he is the crucible whereby humankind will be judged, purified and refined. In the person of Jesus each person is presented with an ultimatum, a choice for or against Jesus. The terms and consequences of our decision are more binding than the blood ties that unite a family. Who or what will we choose?

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

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