

## 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2025 (Year C)

As a Little League coach, I often told my players not to get upset if I yelled at them, but they should be worried when I stopped.

I carried that philosophy as a manager of people. I always tell my employees, “When I stop criticizing you, it means I’ve given up hope.”

Jesus says some demanding words to us this Sunday.

**“I have come to cast fire on the earth.”**

In Scripture, fire also has this dual meaning. There is fire that is good. For example, the burning bush that appeared to Moses in the wilderness, from which the Lord called him to free His people from Egypt. The pillar of fire that led God’s people safely through the wilderness at night.

And at Pentecost, divided tongues as of fire appeared among the apostles, filling them with the promised Holy Spirit, and giving birth to the church.

But fire in Scripture is not always positive. John the Baptist also warns people that every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Jesus himself says that on the day of judgment, some will be told to depart from him into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. The Letter of Jude encourages us as Christians to snatch out of the fire those who are wavering in their faith.

What kind of fire did Jesus come to bring to the earth? When you think about it, there is something that all fire has in common, and that is that it changes things.

Whether it is lighting up a room or burning down a building, fire is changing things around it. And I think it's safe to say that Jesus came to earth to change things.

**“Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth?”**

This month, the world marks the 80th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – two events that brought the horrors of World War II to a close and yet left deep wounds in the human family that linger to this day.

These anniversaries remind us of the tension that Jesus describes. The human longing for peace is universal, but history shows how far we often are from the peace Christ offers. Nuclear weapons brought an end to fighting, but at a terrible cost to human life and dignity.

The division between God’s vision for humanity and the choices we make in fear, pride, or revenge remains painfully real.

St. Matthew has told us in the first 11 chapters of his Gospel that Jesus clearly came to bring peace to the earth. So, what does he mean when he says that he has come not to bring peace, but rather division? And that even families will be divided by him?

Just this past Friday, written on the backdrop during the press conference of the President of Russia and the President of the United States were these two words: **“Pursuing Peace.”** Infer from that what you will.

There is a false peace that can extinguish the fire of the gospel. The kind of peace that demands that we all agree with each other; the kind of peace that can be used to intimidate people and crush them into silence; the kind of peace that makes any change impossible. This is the kind of peace, I think, that Jesus warns us about.

Jesus didn't come to earth to bring us this shallow peace. Following him will sometimes get us into trouble. We will say things and do things that are resisted. Just ask Peter and Paul. Maria Goretti and Maximillian Kolbe. Oscar Romero, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr..

If the mission of Jesus were simply one of peace, without any possibility of division, he would never have been crucified.

And if the mission of the Church were merely peace, without any possibility of division, Martin Luther would never have had the courage to speak truth to power.

And if you and I are going to set the world on fire with the love of God, then we, too, will have people resist us.

For most of our country's history, Christians have enjoyed a level of comfort like nowhere else in the world. Judeo-Christian morals were agreed upon as the guiding law of the land. However, those days are behind us.

We are living in a culture where Christianity is no longer the dominant or primary influence on society's values, beliefs, and practices.

There continues a significant shift away from a society where Christian values were widely accepted and practiced, to one where they are less influential or even rejected. The words of Christ are playing out right before our eyes.

Even if you have never considered the invitation to follow Jesus as an offer to be divided from the world, it has become apparent that playing both sides is no longer an option.

However, all is not lost.

**“As long as we persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of [our] faith.”** Heb 12:2