

Twentieth Sunday Ordinary Time

One of the many titles that Jesus has is the “Prince of Peace”. Jesus is the only one that can bring lasting peace into our world and into our hearts. In a world that seems to have gone crazy and provides so many distractions that aren’t physically, emotionally, or spiritually healthy, we need a source of goodness and peace that can keep us grounded and stable. Jesus provides this stability and can calm our troubled hearts.

Yet, in our Gospel reading, Jesus tells His disciples that He has not come to establish peace on earth, rather division (Lk 12:49-53). He comments that even in families there will be division. This seems to completely contradict what we know about Jesus being the Prince of Peace. So, what is Jesus talking about here? Jesus first of all mentions that He has come to set the earth on fire; and how He wishes that it was already blazing! Of course, we realize that the fire that Jesus is talking about is not a fire that destroys. It is the fire of the Holy Spirit. This is a fire that purifies and energizes those that receive this gift. We see what Jesus was talking about at Pentecost. The disciples were in the upper room when the Holy Spirit descended upon them in tongues of fire. Once the Holy Spirit entered into them, they immediately went out into the crowd and began to prophesy (see Acts 2:1-11). This is the way that Jesus wants to set the world on fire. It is through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. So, Jesus is not a terrorist that wants to destroy things and people; rather Jesus is sending a gift to the world. It is a fire that will change the face of the earth forever.

However, there is that other aspect of the Gospel reading that we have to answer. This is the fact that Jesus said that He has come to cause division, not peace. Once the day that the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, and the good news of the Gospel began being spread throughout the land, there has been opposition to it. In every generation there has been opposition to God’s word. We see this in the first reading from the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 38:4-6, 8-10). Jeremiah preached God’s word to the leaders of Israel. This was a word of repentance and conversion that the leaders did not want to hear. They opposed Jeremiah so strongly that they threw him down into a cistern and left him for dead. The leaders of Israel have treated many of God’s prophets very badly. Jesus warns that this opposition to His word will happen even within families, even to the point of father being against son and mother against daughter.

This opposition to God’s word continues into our own day and time. Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world. Even in this country there is opposition to the Church. Many people don’t want to hear its message, and this message may include such issues as being against abortion, contraception, euthanasia, same sex marriage, and more. There are many examples of some people trying their best to stop the Christian message completely, on college campuses, in federal offices and workplaces, in public schools, and in many other locations the Christian message is not allowed to be voiced. In some countries it is considered a hate crime to preach the Gospel message about certain subjects. Wherever God’s truth is trying to be shared the devil is trying his best to stop the message. Why is this? Is it because the message discriminates? As many people think. Is the Christian faith intolerant? No, the Christian message is the truth that salvation comes through Jesus Christ, and that we are called to a certain level of morality as His disciples. This knowledge of salvation through Jesus and its call to lead a moral life is something that the devil does not want people to hear. God’s word brings a change of heart and leads people to the source of salvation – Jesus. The devil doesn’t want this to happen. He wants to prevent this from happening. And so, the devil will always oppose God’s word.

Don’t get discouraged whenever you speak God’s word and face opposition. This is bound to happen. If it does, don’t worry, you are in good company. The same thing happened to God’s prophets and saints. We also know and trust that the prophets and saints are praying for us. As we heard in the second reading, “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us . . . persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.” (Heb 12:1-4) Jesus knows that we will be opposed at times for speaking His word. He does not abandon us though. Jesus is with us and strengthens

us in the fight. Jesus knows what it feels like to be opposed. As we also heard in the second reading “For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, . . . Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.” Jesus knew that His word would be opposed very strongly; yet the truth had to be proclaimed. The truth, despite its opposition at times, leads to salvation. This is what Jesus died for. This is what we should strive to proclaim as His disciples. For the truth sets people free and leads to salvation and the glory that awaits us in heaven.