

## HOMILY for 20<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

“Young man,” said the angry father from the head of the stairs, “didn’t I hear the clock strike four when you brought my daughter in?”

“You did, sir,” admitted the boyfriend. “It was going to strike eleven, but I grabbed it & held to the gong so it wouldn’t disturb you.”

The father muttered, “Doggone! Why didn’t I think of that one on my courting days?”

Anyway, we all have our own differences that sometimes might cause disagreements & fights with our family members. Even if we get along well with some family members, we’d disagree with them at some point. Indeed, disagreements & fights happen around us every day. Now, we hear this message in today’s Gospel, “Jesus said to His disciples: ‘I’ve come to light a fire on the earth... Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? I assure you, the contrary is true; I have come for division.’” So, what is Jesus talking about? Why would Jesus want to light a fire on the earth when the whole world is already on fire with its existing disagreements & fights? How could Jesus come for division instead of peace?

Before we answer those questions, let’s take a look at today’s First Reading. Apparently, Jeremiah made lots of prophecies calling people to turn away from their sinful ways of life & return to God. His prophecies made some people worry and challenged others to change their current way of life. Here’s how today’s First Reading explains about the dilemma of prophet Jeremiah. The princes said to the King: “Jeremiah ought to be put to death. He demoralizes the soldiers who are left in this city, & all the people, by speaking such things to them; he is not interested in the welfare of our people, but in their ruin.” Like I said above, Jeremiah called people to change their ways of life. Otherwise, God would punish them for their sins. His prophecies evidently demoralized the soldiers and shook all the people at their core. The princes hated the moral and spiritual upheaval that Jeremiah was causing to the public. They decided to get rid of him by throwing him into a dry cistern.

Jeremiah was holy & sincere about his prophecies. All he wanted to do was to turn the people away from their bad ways of life. He wanted to help them reconcile with God & create a good, long-lasting relationship with God. But, they did not appreciate him. Instead, they tried to get rid of him. Sadly, no one tried to defend him & stand up for him except Ebed-melech the Cushite. Here’s what Ebed said to the King, “My lord King, these men have been at fault in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah, casting him down into the cistern. He will die of famine on the spot.” Thankfully the king listened to Ebed’s explanation & ordered the people to save prophet Jeremiah. If Ebed did not have courage & integrity to stand up for Jeremiah & defend him, that good & honorable man would suffer at the hands of evil people & face a horrible outcome. Ebed went out of his way & put his reputation & well-being at risk to defend a good & innocent prophet from a group of evil people. It’s rare to find courageous & honorable people like Ebed in our world. People would rather spread rumors & criticize others than standing up for a good person & defending his/her reputation. That’s why we’ve seen the mob mentality & bad treatment of good people throughout our human history. It’s got worse in our human society these days.

I don’t know if you’ve ever wondered why we don’t have people of integrity and good ethic running for political offices & taking on public positions. It’s not because we do not have any good people left in the world. Rather, these good people do not want to subject themselves

to all the criticisms & bad treatments by the public mob. They cannot find enough courageous and honorable people like Ebed-melech to stand up & defend them. But, their good characters & high moral standards would attract a mob of evil people who would be willing to tell lies about them & attack them with bogus accusations. That's why we've seen a lot of bad people running & holding public offices these days instead. We can hardly find good and honorable people represent us in public offices & courageous people to defend them against false accusations.

That's what Jesus wants to talk to us about in today's Gospel. He wants us to be different from the rest of the world as His followers. He demands us to have a higher standard & act with integrity & courage. He needs us to show God's love & compassion to the people around us. He calls us to be people of love & peace. If we act violently & hatefully toward others, what is the difference between us & the rest of the world? If we have bad moral standards & make bogus accusations on good people like the mob does, it is time for us to change. That's why Jesus comes to call us to change & be different from the rest of the world. He asks us to separate ourselves from the world of hate, violence, lies, & bad moral standards. He encourages us to stand up for people of good characters & defend them from the mob & false accusations. That's the division that Jesus warns us about in today's Gospel. That's the fire that He wants to light up in our hearts & call us to let it shine in our world of hate & violence. Otherwise, we're not different from our current world of bad moral standards.

My dear brothers & sisters, Jesus did not come to call us to fight with our families & hate everyone around us. He did not suggest that we have to look down on our families & friends as someone who is morally superior. Rather, He asks us that we should not side with a mob & make false accusations against a good person or follow its ways. We should follow His teachings & act as people of love & peace in the world. We should have the courage to stand up for good people & defend them from false accusations of mean/evil people in the world.