

HOMILY for 20th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel talks about Jesus coming to set the earth on fire and make it change. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this brand-new cute story that I'd like to share with you.

One day the Israeli soldier at the checkpoint on the military highway addressed the aged Arab riding along on his donkey, his young wife trudging before him. "Sir, I've been watching you go by every morning for months," the guard commented, "and you always ride on the animal, & your wife is always on foot. Why?"

"Wife no have donkey," replied the Arab with a shrug.

"I can see that sir. But, why does she walk in front of you? Is that the custom of your people?"

The Arab shook his head. "Land mines!" he explained.

Jesus sure does not want people to treat one another like that. That is why He came to light up a fire of faithfulness & kindness to put an end to actions like that in our world. Here is Jesus in His own words, "...I have come to light a fire on the earth. How I wish the blaze were ignited!... Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? I assure you, the contrary is true; I have come for division. From now on, a household of five will be divided, three against two & two against three." So, what did Jesus mean by that? Are you shocked to hear Jesus say that He came to establish not peace, but division?

This Sunday's Gospel is one of the Scriptural passages that I have had to read over & over & reflect further on what Jesus did during His ministry to understand His real message. At first, I thought that there was a mistake in translation when people translated the Bible from its original language of Aramaic into English. Then, I reviewed everything Jesus did on earth & had to agree that He came to bring division in our world & separation of the good from the bad, or at least division of saints from sinners first and then peace might happen later.

Jesus was not the one who liked to maintain the status-quo like other religious leaders & prophets did. He did not tell people to do one more prayer & make an extra sacrifice on the altar to appease God; & everything will be alright. Instead, He demanded everyone to change their ways of life completely & come home to God. He wanted sinful folks such as tax collectors & prostitutes to turn from their former ways of life & be reconciled to God. He told the Scribes & Pharisees to stop pretending to be religious with all their religious rituals & start treating everyone with kindness & compassion. That is why He came up with new Commandments of love, love God with all our hearts & minds & love our neighbors as ourselves. In fact, He even called on the Jewish public to expand their old concept of neighbors by telling them the Parable of the Good Samaritan & challenged them to love not only their neighbors but also their enemies. He asked the rich & the powerful to have some concerns for the poor & the widows by preaching sermons like the one on the plain about "Blessed are the poor for the Kingdom of God is yours... & Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation..." (Luke 6:20-26) & Parables like the one of poor Lazarus & a rich man (Luke 16:19-31). He told the public the Parable of separation of the sheep & the goats on the Last Day to help everyone learn to treat one another with kindness & compassion. He sure stirred up public conscience & made the Jewish religious leaders feel rattled. His revolutionary teachings brought about division in many households & separation in the Jewish society because everyone had to

choose between His way of virtues & goodness & the worldly way of sins & evil. But, that is how He could separate the good from the bad before He could truly build up a peaceful & loving community.

Jesus was certainly considered the religious rebel of His time. But, He did not let the threat & resistance of the Jewish religious leaders to deter Him from preaching the truth & doing the right thing. In fact, He sacrificed His own life on the Cross to reconcile & point the world home to God the Father. Similarly, prophet Jeremiah told the people of God the truth about the siege of Jerusalem city by the Chaldean Army & advised them to flee it. His action was considered treason; & he was handed over to his enemies & thrown into an empty cistern to die in the mud of starvation & thirst as we have learned about it in this Sunday's First Reading. Thankfully, his friend Ebed-melech was able to persuade the King to have him rescued from the cistern. The King tried to get Prophet Jeremiah to kiss up to him & prophesize on his favor regardless of the truth. But, Prophet Jeremiah refused to do it & sell out his personal integrity. We sure need lots of leaders like our Lord Jesus & Prophet Jeremiah in our world nowadays.

Unfortunately, we have lived in a time that most religious leaders do not have courage & integrity like our Lord Jesus & Prophet Jeremiah to stand up for the truth & the Gospel values in spite of their personal costs. In fact, most priests & Christian leaders these days have not spoken against the inhuman way that our current politicians have treated immigrants & the poor. They have sided with the rich & the powerful & allowed them to cut funding to USAID & other charities in our country & around the world that would result in over twenty million deaths of AIDS victims alone in the near future. They have let our politicians fool the public with their disguise of being pro-life by taking a stand against abortion while supporting death penalty & neglecting programs that take care of the poor & the social outcast. These same politicians & their supporters allegedly claim to be pro-life with their stand against abortion, but they have let starvation happen in Gaza & thousands of innocent lives lost due to endless bombing & war in the Holy Land without condemning it. Sadly, most priests & Christian leaders have also turned a blind eye on sinful politicians & supported their ways of life & policies that are against our Gospel values. For they do not want to "rock the boat" & bring the light of faithfulness & division to a sinful world like our Lord Jesus & Prophet Jeremiah did in their life time. So, I pray that our Lord Jesus will change their hearts & have mercy on them on Judgment Day.

My dear brothers & sisters, by bringing the light of faithfulness & division to our world, our Lord Jesus wants to tell us that He stands for goodness & the Gospel values while the world follows the way of evil & bad influences. It is up to us to embrace His side & follow His way of life. Or, we could keep taking on the side of the world & following its corrupted political & religious leaders. As you contemplate on that important decision, let me leave with you this wise advice of St. Paul in today's Second Reading, "...Let us rid ourselves of every burden & sin that clings to us & persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader & perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before Him He endured the cross, despising its shame, & has taken His seat at the right of the throne of God."