

Scripture Study

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Cycle C



Opening prayer

Jeremiah 38:4-6,8-10

(Psalm 40:2-4, 18)

Hebrews 12:1-4

Luke 12:49-53

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's Gospel reading takes up where last Sunday's Gospel left off: Jesus is in the midst of his long, final journey to Jerusalem. Along the way, he teaches both his disciples and the crowds, primarily about the kingdom of God.
- Jesus speaks of his desire (to the point of anguish) "to set the world on fire" (Luke 12:49-50). In the Scriptures, fire is often used as a sign of God's presence and love (Deuteronomy 4:24; Acts 2:3), his judgement on sinners (Leviticus 10:2; Matthew 22:7), and divine purification (Luke 3:16; 1 Peter 1:7; CCC 696). In the context of this Sunday's Gospel reading, here it seems to refer to the second and third meanings.
- Jesus refers to the "baptism with which [he] must be baptized (literally, "plunged". See Psalm 124:1-5). In this he is alluding to his upcoming Passion (Mark 10:38; Romans 6:4; CCC 1225).
- In announcing that he is bringing division to earth rather than external peace (Luke 12:51). Jesus is not contradicting passages such as Luke 1:79 and 7:50 which speak in general terms of the end of estrangement by sin between God and man through Christ's sacrifice on the cross.
- Among those who claim to follow him, Jesus will not accept peace at any cost. He will divide the eager from the complacent, those who resist sin from those who do not, making them opponents of Christ (Luke 2:34, 6:22-23). As a result, loyalty to Jesus is even more important than family unity and peace (Luke 12:53, Micah 6—7:10; Luke 14:26; Mark 13:12).

Questions:

- Of what "fire" is Jesus speaking? What "baptism"? What division? How and why does Jesus bring division?
- Why do you think Jesus wishes the fire was already kindled? How does this relate to "...peace to those on whom [God's] favor rests" (Luke 2:14)?
- How can Jesus be the cause of division and not peace? What has Christ brought to your family and friends: division or peace? Why?
- How can you tell if it is the Faith that strains a relationship, or the way you live the Faith?
- What signs in your own life indicate how you are doing? What fruits can be seen?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 696, 536, 607, 1225

Closing prayer

Your heart is the altar of God. It is here that the fire of intense love must burn always. You are to feed it every day with the wood of the cross of Christ, and the commemoration of his Passion. -St. Bonaventure

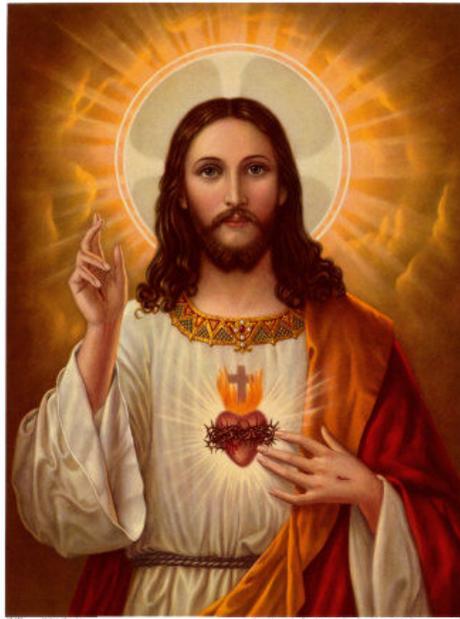
Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"I came to cast fire upon the earth"

Scripture: *Luke 12:49-53*

49 "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished! 51 Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; 52 for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; 53 they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Meditation: Do you want to be on fire for God? Jesus shocked his disciples when he declared that he would cast fire and cause division rather than peace upon the earth. What kind of fire did Jesus have in mind? Fire in biblical times was associated with God and with his action in the world and in the lives of his people. God sometimes manifested his presence by use of fire, such as the burning bush which was not consumed when God spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:2). The image of fire was also used to symbolize God's glory (Ezekiel 1:4, 13), his protective presence (2 Kings 6:17), his holiness



(Deuteronomy 4:24), righteous judgment (Zechariah 13:9), and his wrath against sin (Isaiah 66:15-16). It is also used of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11 and Acts 2:3). God's fire both purifies and cleanses, and it inspires a reverent fear of God and of his word in us.

Jesus regarded the coming of the kingdom of God as a time of judgment. His word of judgment was meant to help people take seriously the consequences of their choices – either for or against God. Our response to the judgments of God has serious repercussions, both for the present and the future. Jesus states that even family loyalties would be challenged on the basis of whether people accepted the kingdom of God or not. The

essence of Christianity is loyalty to Jesus Christ, a loyalty that takes precedence over every other relationship. When Jesus spoke about division he likely had in mind the prophecy of Micah: *a man's enemies are the men of his own household* (Micah 7:6). The love of God compels us to choose who will be first in our lives. To place any relationship (or anything else) above God is a form of idolatry. Jesus challenges his disciples to examine who they love first and foremost. A true disciple loves God above all else and is willing to forsake all for Jesus Christ. Jesus insists that his disciples give him the loyalty which is only due to God, a loyalty which is higher than spouse or kin. It is possible that family and friends can become our enemies, if the thought of them keeps us from doing what we know God wants us to do. Does the love of Jesus Christ compel you to put God first in all you do (2 Corinthians 5:14)?

"Lord, may your love consume me and transform my life that I may truly desire nothing more than life with you. Make me strong in love and fidelity that nothing may hinder me from doing your will."

© 2013 Don Schwager
www.rc.net/wcc/readings/