

20th Sunday of the Year C

*May we love you in all things and above all things
and reach the joy you have prepared for us
beyond all our imagining. (Opening Prayer)*



First Reading

Jeremiah 38:4-6.8-10

The king's leading men spoke to the king. "Let Jeremiah be put to death: he is unquestionably disheartening the remaining soldiers in the city, and all the people too, by talking like this. The fellow does not have the welfare of this people at heart so much as its ruin." "He is in your hands as you know," King Zedekiah answered, "for the king is powerless against you." So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the well of Prince Malchiah in the Court of the Guard, letting him down with ropes. There was no water in the well, only mud, and into the mud Jeremiah sank.

Ebed-melech came out from the palace and spoke to the king, "My lord king," he said "these men have done a wicked thing by treating the prophet Jeremiah like this: they have thrown him into the well where he will die." At this the king gave Ebed-melech the Cushite the following order: "Take three men with you from here and pull the prophet Jeremiah out of the well before he dies."

Second Reading

Hebrews 12:1-4

With so many witnesses in a great cloud on every side of us, we too, then, should throw off everything that hinders us, especially the sin that clings so easily, and keep running steadily in the race we have started. Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which was still in the future, he endured the cross, disregarding the shameful of it, and from now on has taken his place at the right of God's throne. Think of the way he stood such opposition from sinners and then you will not give up for want of courage. In the fight against sin, you have not yet had to keep fighting to the point of death.

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over!

Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; the father divided against the son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Meditation

"I have come to light a fire ... to receive a baptism ... to sow division". Although it is the seed of unity, the gospel is also like a sword that severs and divides. When Luke wrote this paragraph, Christians were living through difficult times and tragic circumstances. Internal ruptures and external persecutions fostered confusion and conflict. Family members opposed each other, betrayed each other, turned each other in to the courts. This was all done in the name of the One who ultimately establishes peace on earth.

One of the paradoxes of Christianity is that it brings both war and peace. Jesus, who said, "I give you my peace", provokes torment and disturbance, for it is a fire he came to bring, not holy water. Charity will not always flourish in a saccharine climate where all conflicts are covered over. Adult life cannot develop without self-assertion. That does not exclude respect for persons, with their limitations and need for privacy. Jesus does not allow us to evade the general law of human relationships.

True charity does not fear to face all the forms of darkness which oppress human society. The Church must sometimes be a catalyst for conflict in the world. In our day we are looking with a more critical eye at the compromises we have made with the established order. We are rediscovering the bitter taste of a gospel which calls all humanity to radical change.