

## 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – C

I would guess that today's Gospel reading is not most people's favorite. It seems a little gloomy with Jesus talking about bringing division. And it seems a little contradictory to other parts of Scripture which talk about the Lord bringing peace, swords being beat into plowshares, and so on. And then there's the repetitiveness of different family members pitted against each other: son against father, mother against daughter, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law, and so on. It doesn't seem to fit in with the rest of Jesus' message. And doesn't the word "Gospel" mean "good news"? This doesn't exactly sound like good news. But like all of Scripture, it needs to be heard and understood in context with the rest of Scripture. The family divisions that Jesus talks about recall the prophecies of the prophet Micah: "For the son belittles his father, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and your enemies are

members of your household.” (Mic. 7:6) But this is not where his prophecies end: Micah then goes on to describe the reunification and restoration of the tribes of Israel.

The divisions described in our Gospel reading are not caused by God but rather by the sin which has entered into the world. And since God gave us free will, we are of course free to accept as well as reject Him. So when Jesus talks about bringing division, he is referring to the division that occurs when people freely choose to reject Him, when they freely choose to reject Truth. When people reject the Truth, the One who has given them life, division is a natural and inevitable consequence. And much of the division today arises from the fact that as a society, we no longer share many beliefs in common. Some things that everyone used to believe, accept, or just take for granted have become controversial. Most of the things that divide families, friends, and our society

now have to do with the human person, human sexuality, and individual lifestyle choices.

And we see division all the time: this is the reality of the world we live in. it's of course all over the news; that's what most of the news is about. There are divisions in our workplaces, our parishes, and especially our families. Jesus Christ did not come to create these divisions, but he acknowledges that He can be the reason for them. It seems that there is more division than ever, at least in the nation and society in which we live.

Our first reading from Jeremiah has a similar theme to our Gospel: various princes denounce the prophet Jeremiah to the king, because as they say, he is "demoralizing the people". Jeremiah is known for always prophesying doom and gloom, and for that he was very unpopular with the people, especially the people in power. Never mind that what he was speaking was the truth and

was for the ultimate good of the people; but he wasn't telling them what they wanted to hear. And who likes to hear bad news? But prophets and preachers and teachers are not called to be popular but truthful.

The princes were able to influence the king and got Jeremiah cast into a cistern where he would have starved to death, but fortunately one of the court officials advocated for him and rescued him. Jesus, of course, knew that he was not going to be rescued. He knew that there was "a baptism with which he must be baptized" – He knew in other words that he was on his way to the cross where he was going to suffer and die. He, who is the Truth itself, knew that he was going to be rejected by his own people. And He knew that he was going to be rejected by people throughout history, down to the present time and even to the end of the world. But the Crucifixion was not the end, and likewise the sin and division in the world will not have the last word. Just as

Jesus triumphed over death in his resurrection, so too will he triumph over the sin and division in the world when He comes again.

And the fire with which Jesus wanted to set the world ablaze is a part of the cleansing of the divisions in the world. The fire that Jesus refers to is the Holy Spirit, whom He would send upon his disciples at Pentecost. And this same Spirit continues to set people's hearts ablaze with the fire of God's love. This fire is both destructive and purifying: destructive in that it destroys the evil that has taken root in our hearts, and purifying in that removes all our imperfections.

Sin and division, as prevalent as they may be in our world today, will not triumph in the end. The Holy Spirit is even now at work in the world, and let us pray that it is at work in our hearts. In the end, Jesus will truly triumph, and all divisions will cease.

We have a role to play in all this; we are called to work to heal division. We don't do this by pretending there are no differences, by reducing everything to the least common denominator, by trying to be as bland and as neutral and as beige as possible in the hopes that no one anywhere will ever feel offended by anything. This doesn't work. It doesn't really heal any divisions. To tackle division in the world around us, we first have to tackle the division caused by the sin in our own hearts. If you want peace in your home, your family, your workplace, your nation, your world, seek to be as Christlike as possible. Seek to give others the benefit of the doubt as much as possible; don't immediately assume the worst intentions of others; and show love to everyone, even if you don't necessarily like everyone. Also know that sin and division will be an unfortunate part of this life, until Christ comes again. But let us always live in the hope that in the end, Jesus Christ will triumph.

- **August 17, 2025 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**