

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



www.orlaghinthecity.ie

**TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME**

14th August 2022

Luke 12:49 Jesus said: “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵² From now on five in one household will be 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 mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

It has long been recognised that this passage is both disconcerting and difficult. The contrast with the usual picture of Jesus as messiah and bearer of peace most likely means that the sentiments go back, in some form, to Jesus himself. In any case, it was almost always the false prophets in the Bible who proffered peace. As the reading stands, it may also reflect the experience of the early church.

Verse 53 The five pairs—literally a handful— hammer home the shock of choice and resultant division. “From now on” (Luke’s version) means that such breakdown is a consequence of Jesus’ mission. It is not that Jesus demands division but rather that the proclamation leaves no one neutral. It is the lack of acceptance of the Good News, on account of evil hearts, which triggers disharmony.

Thought for the day

The famous reflection of Teilhard de Chardin suggests itself: The day will come when, after harnessing the ether, the winds, the tides, gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire.

The uncertainties of today are evident, political, economic and environmental. What can we as people of faith contribute? Again in the words of Teilhard, “there is something wonderful afoot in the universe.” The eyes of faith see the deeper pattern.

KIERAN O’MAHONY OSA - *tarsus.ie*

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

[“I’ve come to start a fire on this earth—how I wish it were blazing right now! I’ve come to change everything, turn everything rightside up—how I long for it to be finished! Do you think I came to smooth things over and make everything nice? Not so. I’ve come to disrupt and confront!” *The Messenger translation*]

1. The commitment of Jesus to his mission is shown in his desire to undergo the baptism that awaits him. Have there been times when there was something you greatly hoped for, even though you knew there would be a baptism of fire along the way? What was it like for you to undergo such a baptism of fire and then arrive at what you desired?

2. As *The Messenger translation* above suggests, the aim of Jesus was not primarily to start a fight, but to put things on earth **rightside up**. He recognized that the message he proclaimed would meet with a mixed reception. This did not hold him back from proclaiming the Reign of God. When have you seen this kind of courage in yourself, or in others?

3. Jesus challenged those listening to him to commit themselves to discipleship, despite opposition from those close to them, even family members. When have you found that being true to yourself and to your beliefs required such courage? What was it like for you when you were able to follow that courageous road?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - *Intercom*

REFLECTION

How can we reconcile the importance of Jesus' ministry of preaching the good news with his words in today's gospel when he says he has come to bring fire and division to the earth? As always with difficult texts in the Bible, looking at the broader context helps.

Jesus has already encountered opposition to his work and there are many who don't find the good news helpful at all. Those who benefit from the structural injustice of the *status quo* do not look favourably on his denunciation of hypocrisy and oppression. Others who look forward to a political messiah for Israel do not want to be told about the universal love of God that transcends nationality to embrace even their hated enemies.

So today Jesus is recognising that action on behalf of the kingdom of God can and will cause division because a sinful humanity may not seek the ways of reconciliation and peace.

SEAN GOAN - *Let the Reader Understand, Year C*

There are many Christians who, strongly established in comfortable social circumstances, have a tendency to regard Christianity as a religion concerned about maintaining the established laws and order. The order we frequently uphold, however, is still disorder, because we have not succeeded in feeding the poor, guaranteeing the right of every person, or even eliminating war or the use of nuclear weapons.

Believers in Jesus are not fatalists, resigned to their situation, seeking, above all, serenity and peace. Neither are they rebels who, goaded by bitterness, destroy everything to put themselves in the place of those they have brought down. They are realists who work courageously with others for a better world in a creative spirit.

Whoever understands Jesus lives and acts, moved by a desire and passion to collaborate in a total change. True Christians have revolution in their hearts - a revolution that is not a *coup d'état* - but is, in fact a search for a more just society.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - *Following in the Footsteps of Jesus.*

Verse 49 Thank God for those people you have known who saw it as their mission in life ("I have come to...") to expose evil in one of its hidden forms and refuse to accept it passively as we are inclined to do. Put their names into the verse so that you can experience and know that the Spirit of Jesus is still in the world.

There is a danger that we will read verse 49 self-righteously or fanatically, and it has often been read like this, Christians covering up a natural hardness or intolerance with the pretence that it was the will of God.

Verse 50 Verse 50 comes, therefore, as a corrective. Jesus is anxious to cast fire, but he took no pleasure in this; he expressed his feelings with the metaphor of a baptism with which he had to be baptised. He felt he was being thrown into a dark abyss and he was afraid. Identify with him at this moment. All his life has been leading here, he knew it was the only way to go, that he would be bringing new life for the world, and yet, he was afraid. This was the moment the synoptic gospels recorded as the agony in the garden and St John in Chapter 12 verse 27:

"Now my soul is troubled.

What shall I say:

Father, save me from this hour?

No, it was this reason that I have come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name."

Verses 51-53 Finally, enter into the movement of verses 51-53, with its "do you suppose?" and "no". Remember a time when you took for granted that the teaching of Jesus was going to make life easier for you, and someone or some event brought you up short, hitting you with the realization, "Hey! It isn't like that at all." That was Jesus entering your life. Respond to the concreteness of the teaching. It is a family of five: mother, father, a married son with his wife and a daughter, and they are divided three against two and two against three. Let the repetitiveness touch you so that you experience the continued pain and the frustration of the division. Then bring Jesus into the story, looking on at that painful situation and saying that it is what has to be. See him as the great leader, not hiding the facts, nor abdicating his responsibility, and thank God for people you have known who were like that.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL – *Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels, Year C*

A few weeks ago Jesus was advising his disciples to greet people with the words "Peace be with you". Yet here he is talking about division. At the time Luke was writing his Gospel the early Christian community was experiencing division, and many households were torn apart over what to believe. We still live in a divided world when it comes to Jesus' message. A certain amount of conflict is unavoidable as we navigate our changing faith landscape, but we do have a choice. Do we allow anger and hurt to shape our interactions, or do we try to listen and to heal, as Jesus did in his encounters with others?

Reflect on your own family relationships. Ask Jesus to come into any area of hurt or conflict you can identify, and to guide you to navigate them.

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT – *Go Deeper*