

20th Sunday (C)

- There are many Christians who, strongly established in comfortable social circumstances, have a tendency to regard Christianity as a religion invariably concerned about maintaining the law & order; some who justify a their own particular understanding of rights by a misuse of Scripture for their own particular selfish motives – such as Christian in America who justify their ownership of guns to defend themselves.
- But the order we frequently uphold, is still disorder, because we haven't succeeded in feeding the poor, guaranteeing the rights of every person for a dignified life, or even eliminating war or the use of nuclear weapons.
- So it's strange to hear sayings from the mouth of Jesus calling not for stability & conservatism, but for a profound change of society: *"I have come to bring fire on the earth, & how I wish it were already kindled!... Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division"*.
- Though Jesus often claims that he comes to bring the kingdom of God, which is his offer of God's peace & love & though he is gentle, he is never weak, & the fire he speaks of is the Holy Spirit, that is not only responsible for bringing peace, healing & comfort, but also passion, pain & disturbance.
- His teachings cause division because they often upset the status quo & threaten people who have much to lose.
- If Jesus had flattered people & said only nice & palatable things to them, he would have won the approval of those who counted & could have made himself popular, but he disturbed people to shake them out of their passivity, indifference & comfort zones to make them realise that there is more & that we can be more & that the 'more' belongs to everyone.
- Believers in Jesus are not meant to fatalists, resigned to their situation, seeking, above all, serenity & peace; they're not meant to be reactionaries who justify the way things are; neither are they meant to be rebels who, out of anger & bitterness, destroy everything to put themselves in the place of those they have brought down.
- Today's gospel reminds us that the message of Christianity is not always a popular one - sometimes we are called upon to speak a hard message; a challenging message; a confronting message.
- The message of the gospel frequently confronts our popular culture & accepted social practices.
- It often contradicts the expedient decisions of our political leaders.
- There is a responsibility on us to live & speak the hard message of the gospel even at the risk of unpopularity & even in the face of threat.
- The Christian heroes of our time are those who call leaders to measure up to the demands of the gospel.
- We betray the Gospel if we reduce it to a sweet message which ignores the differences between the rich & the poor, between the privileged &

dispossessed & which ignores the responsibilities we are given to put into practice Jesus' teachings.

- There can be a tendency to domesticate the Gospel; to reduce it to nice words & feel good experiences.
- When that happens, the fire goes out & the leaven loses its power to transform; the salt loses its taste & the light grows dim.
- We shouldn't be surprised that the Gospel does divide people, even in the Church; true Christians have revolution in their hearts — a revolution that is in fact a search for a more just society.
- We need a revolution more profound than economic revolution — a revolution that changes the consciences of human beings & nations.
- The late Brazilian archbishop, Helder Camara once said - "When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint, BUT when I ask why the poor have no bread, they call me a Communist".
- How abnormal is much of what is accepted as normal?
- The inequalities in society, the gap between the helpless poor & the arrogant wealthy, the violence used by ideologies against people.
- We get so used to all this that they no longer shock us enough.
- We accept injustice, inequality & violence as normal.
- We need the Gospel & the prophets & whistleblowers to jolt us out of indifference & empower us to change things.
- We need a world in which competition, the struggle of individuals against each other, deceit, cruelty & massacre have no reason to exist.
- What's comforting about this gospel is that it recognises conflict as a necessary part of the Christian life.
- There are some who want to pretend that the followers of Jesus should never disagree with one another or with those outside the Church.
- Conflict in itself, Jesus teaches us today, is an element of our commitment to the kingdom of God.
- What marks out the way we should disagree with one another inside & outside the Church, however, is that it is conducted with charity, dignity, careful listening & compassion.
- Christians should always look to put the best possible interpretation on the opinions of those with whom we disagree & to be reconciled to those we have hurt, to heal divisions where we can.
- May this Eucharist give us the courage to divide the crowd for the right reasons; may we be a blazing fire that casts light on darkness where people are exploited; on rationalised policies based purely on economic advantages for the powerful that disregard the dignity & value of human beings & on injustice that smothers the growth Christ wants to see in the human family.
- How are we called to be tenders of the fire of the Holy Spirit?