

Homily of the 20th Sunday OT:

Dear Brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate the 20th Sunday in ordinary time, and the readings remind us that following Christ is not about avoiding trouble, but about courage, endurance, and transformation.

In the first reading, the Prophet Jeremiah faces persecutions during Jerusalem's final days before Babylonian destruction. The city was under siege, food was a problem, and fear filled the air. In that situation, sent by God, the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed a hard truth. In his message, he told the people that resisting the Babylonians would lead to ruin, and the only way to survive was to surrender.

His words sounded like treason, and the rulers of Judah accused him of discouraging the soldiers. Jeremiah was condemned, thrown into a muddy cistern to die, but he found an unexpected savior in Ebed-Melek, an Ethiopian court official, who courageously persuaded the King to rescue him.

The story of Jeremiah reminds us about all the countless people who dared to stand for their peoples and spoke the truth. Even though speaking the truth is often painful, the experience of Jeremiah the prophet teaches us that even in the darkest places, courage and kindness can shine through, it teaches us that God can always provide a helper even when all seemed lost.

This is a call for us to stand in integrity, to stand up for those in despair, and to remember that even in the pit God can rescue us. The experience of Jeremiah encourages us to trust God and to do right, especially when it is hard or unpopular.

In the second reading, the writer tells us that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. These witnesses are not passive spectators, but our examples whose lives encourage and inspire us. We are called to keep away anything that hinders our walk with God.

Christian life is described as a race which requires endurance, discipline, and focus. Our eyes are to be fixed on Jesus, who not only began our journey, but also brought it to completion. He endured the Cross with all its shame because of the joy set before Him: our salvation and the Glory of God.

The writer encourages us to persevere, knowing that Christian journey is not about comfort, but about commitment and faithfulness.

The weights of our lives may not only be our sins, but also our worries, our distractions, or our misplaced priorities. The race is not a sprint, it is not a short distance to run, but a marathon. For this we need endurance and focus.

The call to fix our eyes on Jesus reminds us that our faith is not sustained by our own strength, not by our own efforts, but His. There should be a time when we feel like the road seems to be long, or we see the oppositions coming against us: in that situation, remembering what Jesus endured for us will renew our courage.

In the Gospel today, we hear Jesus saying three things that are difficult for us to understand. He speaks about bringing division, casting fire, and baptism. These words surprise many, because we often think of Jesus as the King of Peace. But here, Jesus tells us that His message will force people to make choices, and it will lead to conflicts, even within families.

Jesus also mentions casting fire upon the earth.

What does Jesus mean by fire?

In the Bible, fire is often a symbol of God's presence (see Exodus), love, and judgement. Fire can burn, but it also warms, and purifies. The fire that Jesus brings is the passionate love of God, a love that challenges us to grow and to change. Sometimes, that process is uncomfortable and bitter, because it requires us to leave behind all the old ways, and follow new paths.

Just as fire refines gold, the love of Jesus is there to refine our hearts, burning away selfishness and fear, and making room for love, justice, and truth.

Jesus also speaks about baptism he must undergo. Here, baptism refers to His suffering and death, the sacrifice He made out of love for all people.

Following Jesus means being willing to make sacrifices as well. It means standing up for what is right, even if it is hard, unpopular, or might cost us something.

Jesus warns us that loyalty to Him may divide households as not everyone will agree about what is most important. Choosing to follow Jesus will always mean putting Him above family ties. It means allowing the love of God to guide us, even if others disagree. The fire of Jesus should burn in our hearts, stirring us into action to care for others, to seek justice, and to stay true for our convictions.

The image of fire calls us to personal transformation. Just as fire refines gold, the spirit of God works within us to reshape our hearts. The message of Jesus is both comforting and unsettling.

- Comforting because He offers the light and the warmth of God's love
- Unsettling because he demands that we allow that fire change our lives completely.

This may mean letting go of our longheld grudges, confronting injustice, or admitting uncomfortable truths about ourselves.

In our lives, we often prefer a superficial peace to deep transformation. Yet, Jesus invites us to something far greater, a peace rooted in justice, truth, and holiness; and this peace comes only when the fire of God burns away all that is false and unloving in us.

The challenge is to welcome that fire, because most of the times it disrupts the familiar. This week, do not run away from the fire of Christ. Let it refine you and set a light in your life with His love.

May God bless us all.