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20th Sunday in Ordinary Time - 14 August 2022

Joe Tedesco

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14 August 2022

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

Introduction

Today we hear a fundamental truth that not everyone will welcome the proclamation of the kingdom of God. Some may even be hostile to it and hostile to those who attempt to respond positively to it, causing division. We should not seek nor foster such division, but nor should we be fearful of it. Nourished by God's word and the living bread of the Eucharist, we find strength and courage to navigate such difficulty.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you lead us in our faith.
Lord, have mercy.

You are at the right hand of God's throne.
Christ, have mercy.

You showed courage even to death. Lord,
have mercy.

Collect

The oration

O God, who have prepared for those who love you
good things which no eye can see,
fill our hearts, we pray, with the warmth of your love,
so that, loving you in all things and above all things,
we may attain your promises,
which surpass every human desire.

The meaning of this ancient prayer emerges from the link between the 'good things which no eye can see', the love of God above all things, and the acquisition of the divine promises which surpass all human longing. The faithful live within the revelation of God's love and goodness. The things which are seen, chiefly God's self-revelation in the incarnation but also inclusive of the church, the liturgy, and creation, point to the good things beyond sight which will be fully revealed in eternal life. In response, the faithful seek to love God in and above all things, in line with the

biblical command. Love is the first and deepest response of the Christian to God. Through such an all-encompassing love for God, the baptised seek to attain eternal life, the promises which are beyond human desire. (Gerard Moore)

First Reading

Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

Jeremiah holds to the truth of his calling and conviction, refusing to soften his message to the city of Jerusalem. He paid the price by being thrown into a muddy pit, stuck and left to die. He is unexpectedly rescued by a non-Judaeen who recognises Jeremiah's innocence.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 39:2-4, 18. R. v. 14

Lord, come to my aid!

A song of deliverance is the focus of this Sunday's Psalm. Taken from the pits of despair, from unsure ground, God lifts us to places of security.

Second Reading

Hebrews 12:1-4

The Letter to the Hebrews again offers us a model to follow. This time it is Jesus himself who, 'for the sake of a joy which was still in the future, endured on the cross'. Setting our eyes on such inspiration, we too can run the race to the end.

Gospel Reading

Luke 12:49-53

In today's Gospel reading we hear Jesus warn that his presence is not going to be automatically well received. The Lord's presence brings a 'cleansing fire' that can cause division.

Reflection

In last week's Gospel we heard something we might not immediately associate with Christianity, the image of the ever-watchful servant on high alert. It evoked a sense of concern that might contradict the tranquil image we may have of a religiously devoted life. This week we hear another even more surprising teaching. The Gospel reading is not an easy one to hear. It is not easy for us to picture Jesus as someone who brings 'fire' and 'division'. The language can appear overly harsh and, certainly on initial hearing, something out of character with what we might normally associate with Jesus.

Part of understanding this Gospel message is recognising that the language and delivery style is an echo of the prophetic language found frequently in the Old Testament. The 'fire' Jesus speaks of may well be an allusion to the symbolic fire of justice that is prophesied by the likes of Isaiah (66:7-17) and the 'refining fire' spoken by the prophet Zechariah (13:9). It is a fire that marks the special visitation of God that necessarily destroys the 'impurity' of lies, injustice and wickedness. In the example referred to from Zechariah, the fire is also the testing that comes with difficulties in life, especially a life devoted to God. Those that come through the fire are the ones that 'call upon the name of God' and who, in turn are answered by God proclaiming, 'they are my people'.

Though it may seem a bit over the top, sometimes we need a good shaking up, a bit of urgency injected into our comfortable lives. It reminds me of the experience I have with my teenage children. They partake in the seemingly ubiquitous activity of watching or listening to entertainment media of one kind or another using mobile devices and Bluetooth headphones or ear buds. Often enough, simply to get their attention let alone deliver any subsequent message, I have to holler out some call that cuts through their embedded sound equipment. Certainly, it is not the normal way I communicate, but occasionally it is the only way I can get through. Sometimes we all need that – to have Jesus smack us with a strong voice, to cut through the din we fill our lives with so that we hear the urgency of God's call and the significance that rests on our response.

The strong language of division Jesus speaks of is due to the response that Christ's presence, actions and teaching evokes. Jesus is proclaiming the kingdom, and this proclamation calls people to respond. While Jesus preaches a message of love and total acceptance of God's own heart, at the same time, this love of God is still a free gift and one that can be rejected. Further, this rejection, as is always the case, has consequences. The presence of Christ draws an urgent and divisive response. There is a response that is life giving, there is a response which is destructive.

The weight of Christ's message continues into the second part of the Gospel reading. It would be a relatively well-known motif that Jesus has come to bring peace. As part of our liturgy of the Eucharist at every mass we hear the quote from John's Gospel of Jesus' offering: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you' (Jn 14:27). What does Jesus say in today's reading? It seems the complete opposite. It is clear that Jesus says no to peace, 'rather I have come to bring division' (Lk 12:51). To emphasise the point, we see the division illustrated with the wrenching of our most vital relationships, the familial unit on which society is based and which the Scriptures themselves venerate as sacred. This seems to be akin to my hollering at my children to get their attention through their distractions.

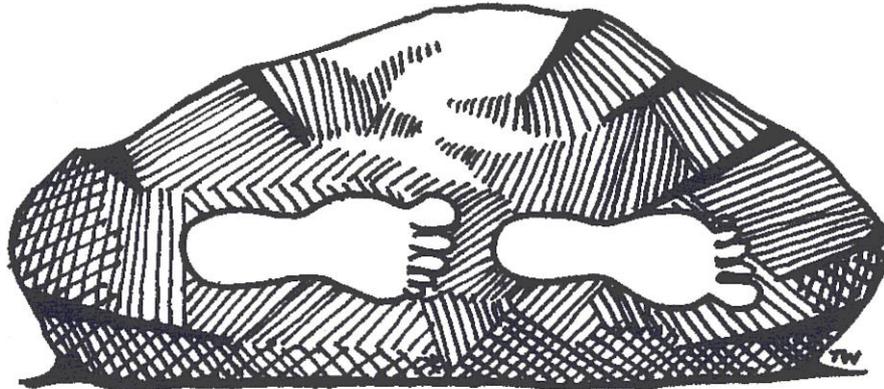
Of course, Christ does bring peace. A peace in our hearts of being right with our God, our world and with each other. It is a peace that goes beyond all understanding and one that is lasting. As one of the fruits of the Spirit, peace is a promised blessing of Jesus' ongoing presence (cf. Gal 5:22-23). We need to be assured that this is not done away with while reflecting on this reading.

However, this peace that is offered is divisive. As already stated, it has always been party to God's saving activity that, as it manifests, one is then confronted with a

choice; enter into God's saving movement or reject it. Further, those who do not respond to the invitation of God's saving activity will occasionally become hostile to it. Part of Jesus' teaching is this hostility is real and it is difficult.

Is Christ asking us to foster enmity between us, especially between our most important relationships? No, clearly not. To seek divisiveness is in no way the call of the Gospel. However, Jesus is warning that there is a price to the peace of the kingdom. In some unfortunate circumstances choosing the truly good, choosing the truth, i.e. choosing Christ, will cause animosity even among our most treasured companions. This is indeed a burdensome cross that some have to bear. For the majority of us, that literal outworking of the Gospel teaching will not be the norm. However, we will all be called to face difficulty at some point because of our dedication to Christ and to Christ's teaching.

Jesus bears the burdens of our sins on the cross, but we too are asked to bear our own crosses in following Jesus. It is not an easy teaching, but a necessary one because our world needs people who are able to stand with conviction for what is right, for what is just and for what God truly desires for our world.



*God, set my feet upon a rock
and make my footsteps firm.*

Ps 40:2

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

The psalmist cries out for God to come to our aid and so, united as one family in Christ, we bring our needs to God.

Petitions

Let us pray for the leaders of our Church, clergy, lay and religious. May they find the peace of Christ even when their beliefs and leadership bring division. Strengthen them in their faith as they lead us through the Plenary Council and the Synod in 2023.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Let us pray for the leaders of the world. May they always seek wisdom from people who truly aim to serve their people.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Let us pray for all those suffering from the effects of war, poverty and the pandemic. May they find the help they need from agencies who can reach them and may we always be generous in supporting those efforts.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Let us pray for those who struggle to believe. May they find companions to journey with them as they seek to come to faith in God.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our own community. When the needs of our faith come into conflict with our wants may we find the strength to follow Christ in love.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who care for the poor in our own community. May they be strengthened in faith and may we be generous as we support their missionary vocation.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have died recently and for those who mourn their loss. May we all find ways to reach out to those who grieve and support them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

As we place our needs before our generous God, we open our hearts in faith and confidence and make this prayer through the power of the Spirit and in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	GA	CWB	CWBII
Be thou my vision	9				733	455
Creator of the earth and skies					663	
Do not be afraid		73		28	594	481
For the healing of the nations				513		
For the journey			128			
Gift of finest wheat				191	685	651
God, whose purpose is to kindle						500
My soul is longing for your peace					751	559
Now let us from this table rise					753	560
O God of earth and space						575
O God, our help in ages past	175			459	767	568
Shine Jesus Shine!						550
Take and eat			162			117
The Church's one foundation				483	819	614
Though the mountains may fall	182			453		
We live and love your word			118			571

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 39: *Lord, come to my aid!*

	CWB	JOBC	LPC
Psalm 39	408	pg. 89	pg. 134

Music selections by Michael Mangan

The bread of life (SHOF) *Based on Jn 6:35* [Communion]