

Sunday Message

20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year C • 17 August 2025 • Psalter Week 4

TOUGH WORDS

LUKE 12:49-53

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and crucifixion. He has been preparing his disciples for what lies ahead.

Today's Gospel can be divided into two parts. In the first, Jesus expresses his deepest desires and, in the second, he prepares his followers for the shaking of their faith's foundations that will lie ahead.

There are two clear images in the first section – the blazing fire cast on the earth and the unique baptism Jesus is about to undergo.

"I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!" he says. Luke uses the symbol of fire in two different senses. In some cases, fire stands as a symbol of divine judgement. In others, it represents the Holy Spirit who comes down on the disciples at Pentecost as tongues of fire. Elijah was the fiery prophet of the Old Testament. When a Samaritan town refuses to receive Jesus and his disciples, James and John wonder whether they should command fire to fall from heaven and consume them (Luke 9:54). Jesus refuses the offer but there are other places in the Gospel where he himself uses fire as a symbol of the coming judgement. If we read the verse in today's Gospel in this sense, it means that Jesus longs for the final judgement of God that will be associated with his death and resurrection. It is not a destructive judgement, however, but a life-giving one in which the fire of the Spirit will renew the face of the earth.

Jesus then speaks of a baptism he must receive and says he is in great distress until he has received it. It is important not to confuse this baptism with a religious ritual such as that performed by John the Baptist. In Greek, baptism literally means to be dipped, submerged, or even drowned. The baptism that awaits Jesus is death. He must abandon himself to it totally, like a person who drowns in deep waters. This prospect fills him with anguish and distress.

The second part of the Gospel concerns the disciples. If Jesus is to face death, they must be ready to face division and opposition even within their own families. That is the cost they must pay for following him. Families themselves will be divided over their allegiance to Jesus. They need to be aware that following him faithfully comes at a price. They need to be prepared to pay the cost. ■

LEARN

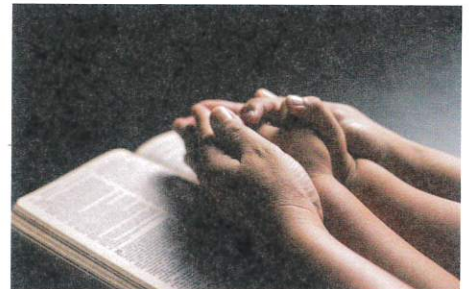
Today's Gospel reminds us that Christianity is not a cosy, comfortable, undemanding religion. It involves sometimes having to make hard choices, choices that cost.

SAY

"Lord, I thank you for the gift of faith. Never let me weaken in my commitment to it. Amen."

DO

Think about your faith. How does it impact on your life day to day? Does it cost you in any real way?



PRAY

Say the words of the Creed with extra conviction today, aware that this is your faith, and aware of the demands that living the faith makes on you.

REFLECT

Every night when I was growing up, we prayed the family Rosary, at the end of which other prayers were added. One of these began "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, come to me a little child."

It portrays an image of Jesus as soft and retiring, the type of chap who wouldn't swat a fly. I said it, as I said so many prayers, without really dwelling on the words.

Gentle, meek and mild is one image we may have of Jesus, but it is not accurate. There is nothing soft or submissive about the Jesus of the Gospels.

A meek and mild Jesus would never have attracted criticism from the powers that be. A meek and mild Jesus would never have

been seen as a threat to the established religious and social order. A meek and mild Jesus would never have been arrested and executed as a dangerous rabble-rouser.

But this is what happened to Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus spoke the truth whatever the cost to himself. He preached a message of tolerance, forgiveness and inclusion that upset many. He challenged injustice and greed. He said the law should be at the service of people and not the other way around, which annoyed the legalists. And he offered an image of God, not as a remote and distant deity whose name could not even be uttered, but as a loving parent we should address intimately.

Jesus upset the religious and social applecart. That's why he ended up on a cross. That's why he could never be described as meek and mild.

And that's the Jesus we meet in today's Gospel. "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." And he talks of households being divided and family members at odds over him and his message.

It is a stark reminder to his disciples and to us: following Jesus means having to make hard choices. It means sometimes having to go against popular opinion; sometimes it means going against our friends and even our family. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

*Turn your eyes, O God, our shield;
and look on the face of your anointed one;
one day within your courts
is better than a thousand elsewhere.*

COLLECT

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. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

FIRST READING Jeremiah 38:4-6. 8-10

A reading from the Prophet Jeremiah.

In those days: The officials said to the king, 'Let this man, Jeremiah, be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm.' King Zedekiah said, 'Behold, he is in your hands, for the king can do nothing against you.' So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.

Ebed-melech went from the king's house and said to the king, 'My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they did to Jeremiah the prophet by casting him into the cistern, and he will die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city.' Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, 'Take thirty men with you from here, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.'

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalms 40(39):2. 3. 4. 18. R. 14b

R: LORD, make haste to help me!

1. I waited, I waited for the LORD,
and he stooped down to me.
He heard my cry. **R.**
2. He drew me from the deadly pit,
from the miry clay.
He set my feet upon a rock,
made my footsteps firm. **R.**
3. He put a new song into my mouth,
praise of our God.
Many shall see and fear
and shall trust in the LORD. **R.**
4. Wretched and poor though I am,
the Lord is mindful of me.
You are my rescuer, my help;
O my God, do not delay. **R.**

SECOND READING Hebrews 12:1-4

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.

Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL John 10:27

R: Alleluia, alleluia.

My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord,
and I know them, and they follow me.

R: Alleluia.

GOSPEL Luke 12:49-53

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

At that time: Jesus said to his disciples, 'I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided: three against two and two against three. 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.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Receive our oblation, O Lord,
by which is brought about a glorious exchange,
that, by offering what you have given,
we may merit to receive your very self.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

*With the Lord there is mercy;
in him is plentiful redemption.*

Or

*I am the living bread that came down from heaven, says the Lord.
Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Made partakers of Christ through these Sacraments,
we humbly implore your mercy, Lord,
that, conformed to his image on earth,
we may merit also to be his coheirs in heaven.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Amen.