

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

[Reading I: Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10](#)

[Responsorial Psalm 40:2, 3, 4, 18](#)

[Reading II: Hebrews 12:1-4](#)

[Gospel: Luke 12:49-53](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/081422.cfm>

Jesus presents the image of fire in the Gospel selection. Fire presents two movements. God was present in the burning bush to Moses. For Jeremiah (20:8-9), the Word of God is like a fire that he cannot hold back. John the Baptist declares that Jesus will baptize with Spirit and fire. The disciples on the road to Emmaus declare that their hearts were burning within them as Jesus explained the scriptures to them (Lk 24:31). Tongue: as of fire came upon those gathered on Pentecost. There is power in fire. The energy that is released has an impact on those around it.

Fire is also associated with judgment. The impact of Jesus' life and death and the words that he spoke, demand a response. For those who accept them, there is spirit and dynamism. For those who reject his word, there are consequences. Family life and relationships were the fundamental structure of society. The message of Jesus changes even these core elements of life. He is a catalyst who brings a new way of living and a



Jeremiah in the Cistern

new social structure. He warned his disciples that they would suffer hardship in following him even as he will suffer.

Jesus continues to be the source of dynamic power for disciples and the cause of rupture and suffering for those who follow him. Those who choose commitment to limited goals or movements become focused on a narrow part of life. The mission of Christ is the universal goal – bringing the Good News to all who are hungry in body, mind, spirit, or community. For those pursuing lesser goals, through greed, anger, pride, or self-centeredness, they will experience the split from the source of life and the emptiness of their pursuits. Thus, splits will occur in families, communities, and friendships over issues of discipleship. One must be careful that one is truly following the teachings of Jesus and not a limited understanding of Jesus' message.

The first reading presents the suffering of Jeremiah as he serves as a prophet of God. Jeremiah had been warning that the fall of Jerusalem would be a judgment from God. The Babylonians were laying siege to the city. The civil authorities saw this as a treasonous act that was demoralizing the soldiers and the residents of Jerusalem. They sought to silence him by lowering him into a muddy cistern.

Most houses in ancient Israel have a cistern (water storage area) below the living level. Rainfall comes mostly from November through March. In order to preserve the water for use during the drier months, it is stored in the cistern. By early fall most of the cisterns become just muddy pits, which are damp and dark. An appeal by a court official that Jeremiah will die, brings a change of heart with the king and a release for Jeremiah.

Jeremiah suffers for announcing God's message to Jerusalem. He caused division amongst the inhabitants of Jerusalem in announcing God's Word. This is the same experience that will beset

Jesus and the disciples. Contemporary disciples need to be aware that hardship will touch their lives as well. The Gospel calls everyone to lay down her or his life in the service of spreading the truth and message of Jesus.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, the author makes reference to the “so great a cloud of witnesses.” These are the people who gave examples of fidelity to God through various suffering that had been cited in the previous chapter. The author is encouraging the contemporary community to stay strong and look to Jesus who endured great suffering. Jesus was focused on the final goal of God’s reign and did not allow the suffering to distract him from his mission.

St Ignatius Loyola offered a similar focus for those who began the Spiritual Exercises.

*The goal of our life is to live with God forever. God who loves us, gave us life. ...
Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better
leads to the deepening of God's life in me. (1)*

Reflection Questions:

How have you seen or how can you imagine, the teachings of Jesus being the cause of strife and conflict?

Have you experienced suffering, small or large, for following Jesus and his teachings in your life?

What does fire communicate to you?

Who is your principal goal in life?

Themes:

Suffering and the Christian Life

Goal of human life

Fidelity

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that we may be transformed by the fire of the Spirit into a dynamic community of faith and give witness to God’s abiding presence and action in the world

For the grace of perseverance: that God will strengthen us in times of conflict and suffering so that we may remain faithful disciples

For all who are suffering for their discipleship: that God give them strength, console them when they are rejected, and help them to respond with love and forgiveness

For families which are divided or in conflict: that God will help them to hear and understand one another and find ways to support each other on life’s journey

- 1) Full text in both original and contemporary wording of the Principle and Foundation can be found at: <https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/ministry/pdf/First%20Principle%20and%20Foundation%20-March%202015%20%282%29.pdf>