

Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time-C

Lk 12:49-53

Dear Friends,

Our Gospel today places us in the midst of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Luke's ten chapters dedicated to this passage are mostly an invitation to enter into the depths of Jesus' message. This movement is the most fundamental and clarifying experience of the human reality: the conflict of good and evil.

Whether we are aware or not, we are totally immersed in this conflict.

Through Luke, Jesus is telling us we must make a choice. This choice has consequences. There will be fire and division. Jesus sees his mission, made very concrete on the road to Jerusalem, to expose the reality hidden by deception and corruption wrapped in the false face of a religious practice that does not want to offend anybody.

Much of religion is always in need of the prophet. Jesus embraced this role of the prophet. He came into the world to attack its mediocrity, its indifference and, most of all, its captivity in evil. Jesus states his desire for fire and baptism. This was his destiny from the beginning: the redemptive death on the cross that would unleash the firestorm of the Holy Spirit.

This ultimate conflict of good and evil was Jesus' life, death and resurrection. His proclamation of the Kingdom exposes a reality that is already in place even though it is hidden. He seeks to destroy the divisions that flow from sin and injustice. The fire and baptism of the saving love of the Cross lead to true unity and peace. However, his message and his life, and especially the death and resurrection, attack the superficial façade of peace that avoids and is blinded by the true violence of rampant poverty, separation and isolation of "the others."

When Jesus speaks of division in the family in today's Gospel selection, he was laying out the harsh realities his presence unleashed in the world. Fire and division are non-negotiables on the road to Jerusalem. We as a church, as a parish and as individuals need to examine ourselves in light of this encounter with God's word. Do we upset anyone by our commitment to Jesus? Does the level of our comfort allow for sufficient space to live the challenge of the true Gospel? Have we reduced Jesus' message to an inoffensive religious practice that upsets no one?

God's word always challenges the unthinking acceptance of the false peace. God's word will constantly produce confusion and uprooting as it leads to the true path of peace that is rooted in justice and concern for the poor. Love is never

without a cost. Jesus challenges us to be on fire for the Lord. This is why his priorities transcend even the deepest of human loves in the family or elsewhere.

True peace demands conversion. This is the personal transformation that accepts Jesus as the center. Only a heart committed to Christ will experience this true peace. Jesus will create a heart in true harmony that will deliver us from the deception of evil and a comfortable mediocrity of indulgence and indifference. True peace in Christ transforms all human love into the true love that springs from the divine Mystery of Love.