

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 14 August 2022

Scriptures: Jeremiah 38:4-10; Hebrews 12:1-4; Luke 12:49-53

Homily: Fr. Ken

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus tell his followers that he has come "to bring fire to the earth". He describes the divisions that will occur even within close-knit families.

Jesus presents the inevitability of discussion or debate that may or may not lead to actual conflict.

In speaking of religious belief, Jesus refers to something that touches the deepest part of a person's soul: the person's relationship with God.

Precisely because this is such an important part of life, people can become quite worked up about it. If our understanding of God were not so important, it would never be divisive.

Jesus recognized this, foreseeing that, even within his own lifetime, his very words would lead to dissension—and to his own betrayal, torture, and death on the cross.

Sometimes the diverging understanding of the Gospel message would become devastating, and yet might only represent differing interpretations of the same word.

Difficulty in finding a common language has separated the Catholic and Orthodox Churches since the Great Schism of 1378.

For that reason, under the leadership of Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Bartholomew I, enormous efforts are being made to rediscover a shared language and understanding of God's work in our midst. Jesus recognized that the Gospel would sometimes lead to discord, but with good leadership a new and enriched unity and understanding is entirely possible.

Before the lighting of the Olympic flame at the start of the summer Olympic games, a lighted torch is carried around the world. It is carried as a symbol of unity and peace.

The traditional one hundred days of peace prior to the games recognizes that competing countries need to be at peace with each other. The national flags flying at the various venues for the games, proclaim that differences in language, culture, politics, economics, and religion are set aside as nations come together, at least for a few short weeks.

Among the countries represented at the Olympics and Paralympics are many with little or no hope of winning a medal. For these, it is enough that they are represented as having their own unique value and dignity on the world stage. Few countries have the possibility of sending large numbers of athletes as their representatives, but even those that can only afford a very small number of competitors are raising their voices in the cause of understanding and peace.

There is a proverb that declares that, "Mighty oaks from little acorns grow". Few people will make much impact on the world stage. However, in recent years, much religious success has been achieved in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Full Christian unity seems beyond our own lifetime, but "unity" does not necessarily mean believing the same things. What it does mean is working together in peace. Slowly but surely, efforts to speak and dialogue together are making a world of difference.

Thus, what we learn from reflecting on today's scripture readings, and on the past 2,000 years, is that religious belief can indeed be divisive even within the family. Secondly, global understanding will take generations to achieve. And, finally, Jesus did recognize that the Gospel would sometimes lead to discord, but little by little, our efforts to speak and dialogue with each other truly are making a world of difference.

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