

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)  
(Jeremiah 38:4-6. 8-10 / Luke 12:49-53)  
14.08.2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

When we read the Scriptures, it is clear that **peace** is at the heart of Jesus' message. The prophet Isaiah who foretold and awaited the Messiah had proclaimed that the name of the Messiah would be "**Prince-of-Peace**". When Jesus was born, the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth **peace** for those he favours". When the Lord appointed the seventy-two, he sent them out with the greeting of **peace** to every house: "Whatever house you enter, let your first words be: '**peace** to this house' and if a man of **peace** lives there your **peace** will go and rest on him". In his letter to the Ephesians, St Paul tells us that "Jesus is **our peace**." We could add many other quotations to justify our claim that **peace** is indeed at the heart of Jesus' message. But in today's gospel passage, we have just heard Jesus say: "Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division". What a paradox! Is there a contradiction in the Gospels, in Jesus' teaching, in Jesus' dream for his people? No, peace really was Jesus' dream for all of us. But, as every movement of the Spirit meets with resistance, Jesus knew that his message would inevitably encounter resistance and even opposition. Jesus knew that those who would not accept his way would violently oppose it. "There is an irony in the way that Jesus sees oppositions and divisions as the negative reactions to his movement of peace and harmony" (Sylvester O'Flynn).

Jesus' dream for all of us is peace. Jesus came into the world to reveal his Father's love for every human being without exception. The Father's love for all of us is the source of our peace. We have to freely choose to receive God's gift of love and live in accord with it. But the truth is that not all of us accept the Father's love revealed in his Son Jesus. In a family, the father will receive it and not the son or vice-versa; the mother will receive it and not her daughter or vice versa; the mother-in-law will receive it and not the daughter-in-law or vice versa. So, in a sense, division is brought by Jesus, division between those who welcome Him with his message of peace and those refuse to welcome Him and his message; division between those with a heart open to Jesus and those with a self-sufficient heart, a heart closed to Jesus.

Where do we stand in all of this? Do we accept the Father's love for every human being, seeing it as the source of our peace, or is this something difficult for us to take on board? Do we go along with the Lord's wisdom, his mercy, his loving and respectful openness to all, or do we prefer our legalistic, judgemental and narrow-minded wisdom? Are we at peace with God, and consequently with ourselves, and with others? Or are we secretly or even quite openly at war against God, and consequently against others and ourselves? To be at peace within ourselves is a condition for our being at peace with others. Peace with ourselves has to be received as a gift from God who loves us. Belief in His love for us is the well spring of our peace.

Peace is a gift from God to be asked for in prayer; it is a gift we have to receive; it is a gift to which we have to give our consent. We have to choose to live our lives in accord with the gift we have received. It is for this reason that so many people work behind the scene for peace. "Happy the peacemakers, God will call them his children". We have to pray for these people. The world

needs their efforts. Each one of us must engage our self in this respect. We should all work for peace wherever we are on the path of life. There is no effort for peace which is useless. Every effort is important in the building up of peace: peace at home, peace at work, peace between generations, peace between social classes, peace between Christian denominations, peace between religions. Yes, every personal engagement, every small step is important for the building up of peace. Peace begins at home; it begins in our own hearts, in our own families and communities.

The Lord Jesus revealed the Father's love during the whole of his life, but the summit of this revelation came with his passion and death on the cross where he set us free from sin and death. "Christ Jesus died for us". There is no greater source of peace for us than the death of Jesus which revealed the Father's love. Jesus said: "There is a **baptism** that I must still receive. And great is my distress till it is over". Jesus' distress is, at the same time, his desire, his haste to fulfil his mission, and his anguish at the thought of his approaching passion and death which are the price to be paid for the fulfilment of his mission.

The Father's love revealed by the Son – the source of our peace – is **a fire** which enlightens our darkness, illumines our minds, warms up our frozen hearts, purifies us by cauterizing – that is burning away our sins. This fire has been alight within us since the day of our baptism when we received the Holy Spirit, this same Holy Spirit who came down on the disciples under the form of flames. Let us ask the Lord for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit for ourselves and for one another today. May the fire of the Spirit be rekindled within us!