

August 17, 2025
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 12:49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!" There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!

"Do you think that I have come to establish peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Background:

The Gospel text follows the Gospel from last week. That Gospel began with a gentle reminder to trust in God's compassion. "Do not be afraid any longer, little flock..." Jesus then turned directly to the disciples with two parables that used the image of servants waiting for their master's return. The parables emphasized the need to be vigilant with the responsibilities entrusted to them. The second of the two parables concluded with the admonition that much is expected of those who have received much.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks in a way that might be disturbing. Often in the Gospels, Jesus' encounters with the disciples begin with the greeting, "Peace." But here he says that he has come not to bring peace but division. Jesus sounds more like the person John the Baptist foretold was coming when he said, "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:7-8)

It may be helpful to keep in mind Jesus' experience of returning to his home community. All three synoptic Gospels record Jesus' rejection.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. ... When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away. (Luke 4:16, 28-30)

He came to his native place and taught the people in their synagogue. They were astonished and said, "Where did this man get such wisdom and mighty deeds? Is he not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Are not his sisters all with us? Where did this man get all this?" And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and in his own house." And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith. (Mt 13:54-58)

He departed from there and came to his native place, accompanied by his disciples. When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands! Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house." (Mk 6:1-4)

Jesus was experiencing rejection by his extended family unit, and in his hometown. To be rejected by one's family was life-threatening. Those relationships formed a network of protection and socialization, and were

necessary for survival. People did not go off to the store if they needed supplies or a distant relative came to visit. Others had skills of creating cloth, tents, nails, door latches, and tending crops and orchards. People needed to have a working relationship with their community. Jesus knew what it was like to have those relationships jeopardized because of his choice. His disciples would and did experience similar kinds of rejection by their choice to become his disciples. Yet he was fully dedicated to his message and living by values of the reign of God. This was not always a popular choice.

Reflection Questions:

1. What images come to mind when you think of fire?
2. Who are the Christian heroes of your life? What do you know of their relationship with their family, community, and followers?
3. Have there been times when you received a negative response from others because of the things you said or did?
4. How does this Gospel affect your image of Jesus?
5. Do you know people who seem to be on fire with the Gospel?
6. How would their community be different without such people? How would you be different?
7. Can you take some time to talk to God honestly and frankly about how you hear Jesus' desire that the world would be on fire in today's Gospel?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for August 17, 2025, the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

In those days, the princes said to the king: "Jeremiah ought to be put to death; he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such things to them; he is not interested in the welfare of our people, but in their ruin."
King Zedekiah answered: "He is in your power"; for the king could do nothing with them.
And so they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Prince Malchiah, which was in the quarters of the guard, letting him down with ropes. There was no water in the cistern, only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. Ebed-melech, a court official, went there from the palace and said to him:
"My lord king, these men have been at fault in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah, casting him into the cistern. He will die of famine on the spot, for there is no more food in the city."
Then the king ordered Ebed-melech the Cushite to take three men along with him, and draw the prophet Jeremiah out of the cistern before he should die.

Lord, come to my aid! I have waited, waited for the Lord, and he stooped toward me. The Lord heard my cry. He drew me out of the pit of destruction, out of the mud of the swamp; he set my feet upon a crag; he made firm my steps. And he put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God. Many shall look on in awe and trust in the Lord. Though I am afflicted and poor, yet the Lord thinks of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, hold not back!

Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Excerpts from Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10; Psalm 40:2-4, 18; Heb 12:1-4; and Luke 12:49-53

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for August 17th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the Gospel from Luke, Jesus tells his disciples, "I have come to set the earth on fire, and I wish it were already blazing! I have not come to establish peace on the earth, but rather division. From now on a household will be divided, a son against his father, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law..."

The other readings have references to someone coming to another's aid, rescues such as being drawn out of a pit, and the joy felt afterward, after enduring some opposition. In the first reading from Jeremiah, the princes determined Jeremiah ought to be put to death, and threw him into the cistern of Prince Malchiah. Ebed-melech interceded, and king Zedekiah ordered Ebed-melech to take three men and draw the prophet Jeremiah out of the cistern before he should die. Psalm 40 implores, "Lord, come to my aid! I have waited for the Lord, and he heard my cry. He drew me out of the pit of destruction, he made firm my steps. You are my help and my deliverer." In the second reading, we hear this from the letter to the Hebrews: "Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross in your struggle against sin."

"There is a baptism with which I must be baptized," Jesus tells the disciples. He has reached the point where he is ready to get on with it, impatient even, to get on with it further, and we say further because he has in fact already started to get on with it! The context for this passage helps us understand its meaning. Jesus has "resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem," knowing he will there be handed over to endure torture and death—and he has spoken to them of this, which they do not yet understand. This passion is the "baptism" he refers to, "with which (he) must be baptized." When one village turns him away, the disciples ask him, "Do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" But the fire he seeks, to "set the earth on fire," is not all-consuming destruction. It is the refinery fire, that metaphor of his passion, that will separate believers from unbelievers, even among family members. He feels the urgent need for this salvation to be completed, and for him to get on with it, to accomplish it, whether they fully understand it or not. As if to say, "There is an earthful of soul-saving to do!" he says, "There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!"

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!