

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time “C” Cycle August 13-14, 2016

Today we hear a lot about religious freedom and how it is not always accepted and protected. Civic authorities sometimes try to confine religious freedom to worship only and not the freedom to promote religious values to the public arena, such as respect for life, for traditional marriage, for social justice, for peaceful approaches to conflicts, etc.

The first Scripture reading, from the Old Testament of Jeremiah, tells us how the prophet who was thrown into a muddy cistern for his message that the people were being besieged by the Babylonians because of their infidelity to the Lord and that it would be better to surrender than to have their city, Jerusalem, and its temple destroyed. Jeremiah was ignored and ridiculed by his own people. Sadly, the destruction did happen and many of the people were led off into exile in Babylon.

In the Gospel, from Saint Luke, Jesus has a very similar message, a rather stark message. He says he has come to “set the earth on fire.” This means to really disturb the status quo. His baptism, which he speaks of, refers to his death and resurrection, which will bring about a religious revolution, which continues to shake the world.

(The baptism of Ashley Paige will give her a share in the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection to life now and for eternity.)

Jesus informs the disciples that his presence and message will bring division, opposition, and hostility even within families. His intention is not to cause such, but will sometimes provoke it.

The Lord Jesus’ message continues to inspire many to great holiness and zeal to help people everywhere. It also incites some to oppose violently Jesus’ message and his disciples. We have evidence of this in the current persecution and annihilation of Christian communities in the mid-East at the hands of ISIS. We have evidence of this in some of our government’s policies to force religious groups to violate their Christian principles.

I just had a visit with a cousin of mine who is a missionary sister in Haiti. Her convent was attacked and robbed by some of the very people she was there to help. Although she was physically restrained, she was not injured.

Jesus indeed is the Prince of Peace who wants to give us peace, joy, and love forever. To enjoy these gifts, however, we must be willing to live our faith strongly in spite of opposition and ridicule. May he give us this grace.