

## Homily St Pius & St Anthony 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Year C1

When I was a kid, my friend Scott and I were washing the family car we pulled up into the yard, and as one of us set the hose down, you know how sometimes the handle sticks on and sprays you. Well it didn't spray us, but it sprayed the charcoal grill and the coolest thing happened. As the drops of water hit the grey simmering charcoals, the neatest sound came out (shhhhhhh) and then smoke rose off them. It was like we had our own version of Mt St Helen's spraying up plumes of ash into the air! A little is good, but a lot better, so before you know it, we were shooting water streams at the charcoals for the shock of it (oooh, ahhs) for about 15 minutes. Finally, the sounds and smoke seemed to quit, so we stopped, assuming they gone cold. We just upended the grill dumping it all into the gravel driveway (charcoals all blended in with the grey gravel). We went back to cleaning up the wash pails, sponges, rags, and played like normal. Until, Scott was leaving. Saying goodbye, he turned and suddenly started going in to some high step, Irish jig dance or break dance moves. I should have known immediately what he was into, but as I thought how strange it was for him to dance, the same inspiration hit me, and I started to hop from one foot, then on to the other foot. Barefoot from the car wash, we had walked into the hot charcoal mine field! There was fire still in those ashes to get us moving!

I suggest this type of 'fiery motivation' is the best approach to understanding Jesus' unusual words today. A lot of people hear him in this passage and think, "Wait, would the real Jesus please stand up? What is He saying, about 'fire-starting' and dividing-splitting up homes, father against son, daughter against mother?" I assure you that this is still the same Jesus we call the 'Prince of Peace'? Don't we remember a couple of Sunday gospels back when he sent out the 72 disciples, he instructed them, "Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this household' (Luke 10:5)? So what are we to make of this incendiary, controversially divisive talk coming from his lips now? Again, I suggest that this is our same peace-loving Lord, because in just five verses from today's explosive words (Luke 12:58) Jesus will teach us to "make an effort to settle with your opponent on the way to court." That surely sounds like seeking terms of **peace**! Jesus is not any bomb-throwing contrarian who slips into groups to throw out irresponsible and inflammatory words, like gas on fire, and then flee off to make trouble elsewhere. No, Jesus is always the good leader who puts out fires, and heals burns left behind by such troublemakers. So, what do we make of Jesus'

talk about lighting blazes and breaking apart relationships? I suggest that our best approach to understanding His point, is to understand Him like a good coach who always challenges his/her players to advance, make one more shot, run one more mile, smooth out their pass and jump just a little higher than the last game. Like in a good pep rally, Jesus wants to **light a fire** under us to get us moving, challenge us to more. He wants to purge any self-satisfied complacency in us, to ask for just a little bit more from us. Think of His wonderful parable of the mustard seed. He is okay with small beginnings, but He wants to keep up the continual growth from it, progressively branching out into largest of trees. So, his fire-talk is not destructive bomb throwing, but constructive heat added to us to light us up. Recall that he will identify Christians as 'light of the world' (Matt 5:14). Jesus is motivating His disciples. This is 'fired up' cheerleading chant. Jesus is adding a charge to His disciples, bringing some spark, stoking their energy-He wants to fire us up. Just last week He pushed for more faith action from all of us, when He said, "more will be expected the person entrusted with more.." (Luke 12:48) Like a good coach, Jesus sees more in us, and wants to draw it out of us. He raises the bar to incite us to grow. Think of some other of His pep-talk, like in Matthew 5:22 when He tells us "Your holiness must surpass that of the Pharisees." Or next week He will command us to 'Strive to enter the Kingdom through the narrow gate!' (Luke 13:24 or Colossians 3:1 "Seek what is above...") Just like any challenge, Jesus is calling us to dig a little deeper, stretch a little more so that we can overcome. He doesn't want us to be complacent about simply accepting the 'status quo', or just whatever happens to be. Like with overcoming of any problem, we have to be pushed a little outside of our comfort range to find solutions. To grow and develop we must keep moving like the fish that must keep fresh water crossing its gills for oxygen and life. So Jesus challenges us that way too. As Einstein said, "The same mind that created the problem, won't be the same mind that solves it (an expanding new perspective is called for). Or the motivational speaker whose mantra is "What got you here, won't get you there". Which brings us to the divisive sounding talk of Jesus about setting father against son, daughter against mother. The key to understanding what Jesus is up to (*of course, He is a totally 'family values' man*), is hearing the 'generational gap' language. Jesus doesn't mean he came to randomly break up homes, turn family against one another. No, He means that he came for a clear difference. When he says "I came for division" think of it as him saying, "I came to make a difference" you will clearly know when

I show up. I will inaugurate a 'New Generation'. There will be a clear divide from time before I came and the time after. I make my mark, you will know the line at which I show up. And don't we? History is divided between the time before Christ BC and the time after him, AD! He wants it clear; again, he makes a difference and we know it. Such epic (epoch) change, is seen through all of his talk about who is going to be divided: It is all generational- from one generation to another, father against son, daughter against mother (like breaking a generational cycle of worldliness-Adam's fall). Jesus never says He will divide brother against brother, sister against sister, or cousin against cousin. He told us at Last supper, that He institutes a 'New Covenant'- That is a division between Old Testament and New Testament! So, Jesus challenges us disciples to be different, not to make peace with just what happens to be inherited fashion, accepted by world. Maybe it's good, but maybe it's not. So, Christians should be counted on to be different (and don't we have much to be different about; 'Jesus' teaching of the last being first, the least being greatest, loving enemies, forgiving everyone, do good to those who put you down, feeding the poor, and on and on). We have so much to make us the new generation, children of new era, a clear demarcation in time-the way things are done, and in our way of living. They will know we are Christians by our creative difference, our constructive fire: Our Holy Spirit-Fire inspired Christ-like solutions to the problems that have bogged down the world. Following Christ means we strive for more, bringing the light flame of faith to all of the dark problems of the world. Doesn't the world desperately need that?