

St Pius & St Anthony 20th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C(2025) Luke

I bet we all have the same question rising in our minds after just hearing today's gospel? ***Where has this Jesus been hiding?*** Is this the same Jesus who said, "Come to me all you who are burdened and weary and I will give you rest?" (Mt 11:28) or "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Children of God" (Matt 5:9) or "My peace I give you....." (Jn 14:27) Is this the same Jesus, who we hear about prophetically from Isaiah, every Christmas, calling Him, the "Prince of Peace"? (Isaiah 9:6) Yet, today, He preaches, "Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? *No, I tell you, but rather division*" (Lk 12:51)

So, what are we hearing? (Jesus on a bad day? Or some change in plans?) No, this is the same Jesus. But since there is a time and place for every thing, then we have to ask, what is he talking about today, at this time and place in the playing out of the gospel's progression?

If we compare the gospel of Jesus to our first reading about Jeremiah, a question comes to mind, that might clear all this up. When it comes to prophets, we need to ask, "What do we want from them?" Do we want smoke or fire? Jeremiah's competitor prophets were blowing smoke, while Jeremiah himself was bringing the clarity of fire, and the guide of true light. Jeremiah was attacked & almost killed by authorities because he wasn't saying what the other 'paid off' prophets were telling the people (this comes up in Jer 29:8-9 too, where God condemns these false prophets for 'dreaming and ***lying to the people***'.) Jeremiah wasn't accepting and just going along with what was societally correct by the opinion polls at the time. He wasn't telling the people what they wanted to hear (and regularly Jesus wasn't telling everyone at his time, what they wanted to hear either-such as 'Love enemies, Forgive 7x70 times, deny yourselves, & take up your cross daily.....') In Jeremiah's case, the false prophets had a ***cozy*** agreement with the people: where the people basically said, "***Lie to us and say everything is okay-*** we only want to hear of unicorns rainbows and skittles." And the false prophets supplied them such fantasies and lies. But not Jeremiah! He shared the truth that in fact their captivity under Babylon, was going to last a long time (70 yrs), and that it wasn't going to go easy.

So what do we want from Jesus, smoke or fire? He says straight out, "***I came to set the earth on fire***" (Lk 12:49) But of course, this is not a destructive fire. It is a creative fire of the Holy Spirit (like a controlled burning bush fire!) Jesus is no terrorist irresponsibly setting things on fire and running away. No, Jesus is saying that He came to 'light up' the Kingdom of God. He came to constructively inaugurate the 'lived presence of God', (His rule) on earth. His fire talk (think of it as a pep rally) is His way of saying, "Let's get this party started!" He wants to fire up his disciples to institute the mission of Kingdom.

Some of Jesus' striking language in gospel, its word choice, may be a little different than how we would say it today? I'll offer a few 'reframings' of words that can tie together several of His various shocking statements about 'divided houses' and 'split families'. First, He announces, "'I've come for **division**.'" He is saying, "Divide - Draw a line in time - & you will see clearly between when I hadn't come and when I had! Hear the word 'division', as Him saying, "I came to make a **difference**". My life divides history clearly from when I wasn't here to when I was! We see that clearly in how we demarcate-divide history, with the whole BC & AD distinctions – 'BC-Before Christ' and AD, 'After Death' or Anno Domini-Year of the Lord, breakdown of our time telling. He came for a division, and he did establish a division in our calendars perpetually. He made a difference!

And how about His word 'peace', He has come to establish peace. But He means a 'different' peace than was being imposed upon the people at the time. Jesus meant He was not sanctioning a pacifying acceptance of the status quo or what just happens to be right now? Jesus doesn't compromise with sin and just rubber stamp, 'go along to get along'. No, His peace is a lasting peace, a peace found only in the kingdom of God. He comes with a different peace, and He does plant 'a flag of peace' (it is the cross staked in Calvary) that refuses to approve the corrupt status quo! And what was that? When people in Jesus' time would hear the word 'peace', their first thought would be the propaganda (stuck in their face on every imperial shield and banner) 'Pax Romano' 'Peace of Rome' - it meant appeasement to Caesar and acceptance of the Empire and its domination (including its deity Caesar) and the empire's power which was brutal and cruel, and forced a submissive peace. The Roman version of pacifying was a demeaning rule of peace at the end of a sword in your face. The tyrannical Caesar held peace by keeping his hands around the throat of every citizen (& every slave under his boot). Jesus was saying "fire & division" to all of that – basically, "Heaven, NO", to such imperialistic indignity!

Like Jeremiah, (John Bapt & all genuine prophets) who stood up truth in front of the corrupt power elite, and to us the people, telling us what we may not want to hear, such prophets make a difference. And forever after the history testifies to the dividing line drawn, by their bringing on 'decision time'!

Which brings us to the last troubling statements of Jesus about 'dividing families'. We know Jesus upholds the 4th commandment – Honor father & mother, and He taught 'Love neighbor as self' and what is self but one's own family. So what is He up to with the father-son, mother daughter splits? Keep in mind that Jesus came to lay a marker down in history. He is ushering in a **new generation**, a new era, a new epoch of Kingdom Relating! His examples break down as 'Old generation-new generation', father-son, mother daughter. He never says 'Brother against brother', 'Sister and sister', 'Sister against brother'? That is significant! He

surely could have with such a long list. Because the Kingdom of God, doesn't have relationships with 'built in' dominance, 'ageist' titles that presume power/control one over another? Why, because in His Kingdom we are all brothers and sisters. We are all children of God (no one better, dominant, just because they were born first, or earlier in time). And to further confirm this interpretation of His division talk, notice also that his numerical breakdowns are 2 against 3 and 3 against 2. Two make a generation - 2 parents create the 3 children. This numerical two shows that this 'divide' is generational! Considering the total is five, Jesus could have thrown in 4 against 1 and 1 against 4 (classic free for all-mayhem) but He didn't. I hear Jesus saying that He came to start a 'new era' or as the old Pepsi TV commercials said, "the choice of a new generation", or like car ad campaign slogan, "This is not your father's Oldsmobile". Jesus is revealing a new Kingdom opposed to the unjust Roman empire peace built on slavery. No more Pax Romano. Now it is Pax Christi, a new Kingdom of equal dignity of everyone as brothers and sisters all sharing one, heavenly Father (new familial arrangement). And Jesus burns to birth this new arrangement among us! How eagerly Jesus longs for us to be baptized into this new family, reborn relationships of true brotherhood and sisterhood to one another (us all seeking to fulfill our heavenly Father's Will) That His kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus started it, and asks us to fan the ongoing fire of divine charity that we were baptized into (*recall John Bpt testimony-Lk 3:16, "I baptize with water, but one mightier than I....will **baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire**"*). Jesus desires us to see everyone as brother and sister in Him.