Homily for the 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time(8/18/2019)

Rev. Francis Kim

The definition of a good sermon: It should have a good beginning. It should have a good ending. And, they should be as close together as possible. Right? I will try.

Today’s Gospel shows us another image of Jesus. This is not the face of a sweet, gentle, kind Jesus. This is the fiery, passionate, and crusading Christ. Jesus says, “I have come to set the earth on fire.” And then, He predicts division. Because of the fire of God’s love, “in a household of five, three will be against two, and two will be against three.”

It sounds shocking to us that faith in Christ should separate parents from children and split families apart. This is an unsettling Gospel reading because the picture of the Prince of Peace bringing discord and division is different from what we expect.

Why is it so? It is because some will resist the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit, choosing worldly fame, the pleasures of the flesh and wealth. Some will choose to walk in the light, while others will prefer to walk through “the dark valley.”

We know, some shouted, “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” while others shouted, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.”

Jesus speaks of the division and struggle that will come as a result of His preaching and mission, and the difficulties His followers will have to face. He tells us that, if we truly want to live as Christians, sometimes we will experience trouble and division in this world.

It seems there is no hope. As you read the headlines or look at your own life, you may be wondering if there is any hope for the future. The answer from Jesus is a resounding yes.

First, there is hope of a changed person. No matter how hard we try, we are incapable of ridding ourselves of the selfishness and greed that cause conflict and strife and division. Our only hope is a changed heart, and Jesus is in the business of changing hearts.

And, there is hope of a changed world. When we know Jesus Christ, He gives us by His Spirit a new love and concern for others. We can no longer be indifferent to their sufferings, and we will want to do something about them. Changed by Christ, we can begin to change our world.

And, there is hope of an unchanging eternity in Heaven. This world is not all there is. Someday all its pain and heartache will come to an end for those who know Jesus Christ. Evil and death will be abolished, and we will be safely in God’s presence forever.

Hope is both biologically and psychologically vital. We still have hope, and true hope comes only from Jesus Christ. He gives us hope for the future as we turn in faith to Him: hope for eternity and hope for right now no matter what happen.

So, in the Gospel, Jesus is not opposed to peace. The words of Jesus describe the very real situation of the first Christian community, where conversion to Christ tore families apart. Back then, to become Christian meant embracing a new way of life that separated people from their families and friends.

And, when He said that He had come to bring division, He was talking about the division that His message would bring between those who accept it and those who reject it; between the righteous and unrighteous. God separates good people from bad.

There is perpetual conflict between these two groups as one group strives to raise the world up to God and the other to pull it down to hell.

These two groups do not live in two different parts of the world; they live side by side in the same neighborhood; they live together under the same roof; and in fact, the forces of good and evil often exist together in the same person.

Christian is not a spectator sports where we just sit on the sidelines and watch. Remember what we heard in the letter to the Hebrew today. “We are surrounded by clouds of witnesses. We are to run the race with our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith. Hence, do not grow despondent or abandon the struggle.”

Following Jesus means to light a fire on the earth, the fire of Christian faith. Jesus wants our faith to burn brightly for all to see. He wants us to light up the darkness right here, in the places we live, in our home, in our work places, in our community, and in our church.

Let our faith and love be fire on the earth! The holy fire purifies, cleanses, and gives light to ourselves and others.