



Bringing Home the Word

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

August 18, 2019

Jesus as Disrupter

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When I was young, one of my favorite pictures of Jesus was one of him blessing little children. How calm and peaceful Jesus seemed, and his eyes were full of love. In later years, I have been drawn to other images and art of Jesus holding, healing, and granting mercy to his beloved children.

The image of Jesus as a nurturer is so comforting that I tend to forget that Jesus also disturbed the peace, questioned authority, and demanded complete obedience and loyalty.

For first-century Christians, following Jesus often meant leaving family and friends, civil disobedience (not considering Caesar as a god), and reimagining religious traditions.

The Christ who sows division is uncomfortable, but Christians in every century have had to speak out against evil and sin, especially when their culture's or country's practices lead people away from rather than toward God. Even here in the United States, Catholics have found themselves defending the dignity of all human life and economic and social justice for the poor, even when it meant challenging the prevailing attitudes and political climate. It's rarely easy to speak truth to power or popularity, and we have to guard against those who think they are always right or somehow above God. Jesus himself recognized that he would not always be popular, so he lifted up the two great commandments to love God and neighbor as the measure of how we should act even when those actions divide us. +

*It's difficult speaking
truth to power,
yet we must guard
against those who think
they are always right.*

A Word from Pope Francis

I encourage you always to have prophetic courage in rejecting everything that demeans human beings, and all forms of [degrading] exploitation. Continue to show those signs of hospitality and solidarity, great and small, which can light up the lives of children and old people, migrants and refugees, in search of peace.

—Address to Caritas Internationalis,
November 17, 2016



Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 38:4–6; 8–10

[King Zedekiah said,] "Take three men with you, and get Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies."

Hebrews 12:1–4

Consider how [Jesus] endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

Luke 12:49–53

[Jesus said,] "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- What is my purpose?
- Am I willing to make a stand for righteousness, even if it makes me unpopular?

The Big Peace of Christ

By Bishop Robert F. Morneau

“Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.”

—Luke 12:51

Why did Jesus come to earth? What was his mission? Was he sent for unity or division, for life or death, for love or hate? The answer is clear: Jesus came that we might have abundant life (John 10:10). But there is a deep paradox. In Luke’s Gospel—and especially in verse 51’s quote from Jesus—it appears that division, not peace, is Jesus’ real mission.

We should ponder this paradox. The poet T. S. Eliot provides an insight: “Beneath the bleeding hands we feel / The sharp compassion of the healer’s art.” The surgeon cuts away the cancer, a bloody, divisive act indeed. Yet the motive isn’t to inflict pain. Rather, it is to bring healing. No false tenderness allows the healer to withhold the knife; no good parent avoids disciplining his or her child. To bring health and peace, pain is sometimes needed.

So Jesus causes division wherever there is an unhealthy, unholy union. Out of compassion, the Lord separates us from everything that keeps us from the love of the Father. This may appear cruel, but it is in fact an act of divine kindness. Shakespeare’s Hamlet addresses

his mother, the queen, in these words: “I must be cruel only to be kind.”

“Graced” Division

St. John XXIII spoke often about peace—the peace of God’s kingdom. In *Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris)*, he maintains in the encyclical that peace demands four elements: truth, freedom, charity, and justice. Jesus came to inaugurate that

kingdom; he came to express truth, to incarnate love, to foster freedom, and to promote justice. In this mission there would be much division, since people often opted for untruth, indifference, slavery, and injustice.

Everyone must distinguish graced division from divisions that are simply

destructive. The surgeon’s knife separates a diseased organ from the body—a moment of grace. The slave trader separates children from their parents—a horrendous sin. Moses placed before his people a choice of life or death (Deuteronomy 30:19). We are given the same choice: to be agents of life and peace or instruments of death and chaos.

Just before Communion we pray, “Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles, ‘Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.’” So when we read, “Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but

rather division,” we know that Jesus is referring to a false peace, one in which relationships are not harmonious. Jesus will have nothing to do with such unions—he will split them apart for the sake of truth.

Examples of Christ’s Peace

The human condition requires painful choices that sometimes cause division. We need but note the work of the following Christians: Martin Luther King, Jr., in his ministry to secure human rights; Thomas Merton, in his stand against nuclear war; Dorothy Day, who fought against the status quo that kept so many in radical poverty. All of them came to bring division, not peace. These disciples of Christ fought for the big peace: the kingdom of God.

Those great people showed us that God’s word is a two-edged sword. We can be like them. It is a good spiritual exercise for all of us to write out a mission statement. What has God called us to do? Why have we come to this earth? Surely a task we have all been given is to bring peace and right relationships. We can, with God’s help. +



WEEKDAY READINGS

August 19–24

Monday, Weekday: Jgs 2:11–19 / Mt 19:16–22

Tuesday, St. Bernard: Jgs 6:11–24a / Mt 19:23–30

Wednesday, St. Pius X: Jgs 9:6–15 / Mt 20:1–16

Thursday, Queenship of Blessed Virgin Mary: Jgs 11:29–39a / Mt 22:1–14

Friday, Weekday: Ru 1:1, 3–6, 14b–16, 22 / Mt 22:34–40

Saturday, St. Bartholomew: Rv 21:9b–14 / Jn 1:45–51

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PRAYER

*Lord, you send us your Spirit
to renew the face of the earth.
Filled with your love,
help me make a difference.*

—From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney