

20<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY of YEAR C (edited)

Homily given at the Cathedral of St. Matthew on Sunday, August 18, 2019

What is the Spirit saying to the churches, to all of us, in today's readings? How do we deal with those divisions, conflicts, and the persecutions that we heard and know some in families and communities?

Jeremiah had told the people in the besieged Jerusalem, **"Thus says the Lord, This city shall certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon."** The leaders did not want to hear it. They complained he was demoralizing the soldiers and citizens. They had him put in the muddy cistern. Some friends pulled Jeremiah out so he could warn the king. Too late. Shortly the enemies overran the defenses, captured the king, led away captives and destroyed the city just as Jeremiah predicted.

In the gospel Jesus talks about his baptism of suffering that is coming. And then he makes that challenging statement. **"Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."** That is quite a different note from his assurance to his apostles at the last supper, **"Peace is my farewell to you, my peace is my gift to you"**. It is not exactly a contradiction. Remember Jesus said his peace was not the kind of peace the world gives.

Our first parents disobeyed God. Adam blamed Eve for tempting him. Eve blamed Satan. We could blame them for what we inherited from them. **"It is not my fault."** Sound familiar? From their punishment we inherited our weak wills and our darkened intellects. We are gullible to the wiles and deceptions of those spiritual powers that are opposed to God's plan for us. So we are the ones who create the divisions and fightings that go on in families, communities, and nations.

The Son of God on becoming man knew what he was getting into, a battle ground with those for God versus those against God. His teachings about forgiveness, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, and being willing to suffer for the good of others however go against the grain of our sense of justice, pride and putting oneself first.

The disruption of peace begins within each of us. Even when we know the good, we do not do it. Paul wrote eloquently of that to the Romans, **"I know that no good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; the desire to do right is there but not the power. What happens is that I do, not the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend. ... My inner self agrees with the**

**law of god, but I see in my bod's members another law at war with the law of my mind ... What a wretched man I am! Who can free me from this body under the power of death?**

That discord of the divided self then flows over into broken relations with others. Father turn against son, mother against daughter, husband against wife and then there are in-laws. From there it exudes out into communities of peoples.

Still there is a deep longing for peace in each of us. Paul answers his question, **"Who can free me from this body under the power of death?"** with, **"All praise to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."** It should be our answer too. Jesus came to show us the way out of slavery to sin and fear of death and he demonstrated the way by accepting his sufferings, even death on the cross in obedience to the Father's will. If you want peace Jesus says, **"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."**

That yoke is the cross. In the second reading from Hebrews we heard how Jesus coped with his. **"For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame."** We are encouraged to persevere in the struggle by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus the author, the leader, the perfecter of our faith. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus! Besides he and the Father have poured their Spirit into our hearts. So to help us fight the battle we have that shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God,.

Even more we have Jesus in the Eucharist. He invites us to unite ourselves at the altar with him in the offering of himself for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the whole world. At the end of that passage from Romans about the divided self, Paul exclaims, **"There is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the spirit, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has freed you from the law of sin and death."**

With gratitude and joy let us give praise, honor, glory, thanksgiving and humble obedience to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever.  
AMEN