



Luke 12:49-53

49 Jesus said to his disciples: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! **50** There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over!

51 'Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. **52** For from now on a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; **53** the father divided against the son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'

Other readings: Jeremiah 38:4-6,8-10 Psalm 39 (40) Hebrews 12:1-4

The words of Jesus in the gospel can sometimes be quite shocking. How is it possible to believe that Jesus has come to bring not peace, but conflict? The prophet Jesus uses blunt and challenging language. His words convey a profound truth, for the consequence of his preaching will be division, even within families. His uncompromising preaching about God and human life produces opposition and division, which both Jesus and his followers have to face.

Fire is nevertheless a disturbing image. It is used in the Jewish Scriptures to symbolise punishment and destruction. Jesus is using the strong language common among his contemporaries to speak of the judgement of God in stark terms. He speaks also of his coming baptism. In Christian baptism we undergo a kind of dying in order to reach new life. Baptism for Jesus is the baptism of the cross, his death leading to resurrection. Jesus is anxious to continue his journey to Jerusalem and to complete his mission.

Jesus explicitly says he has not come to bring peace. These words speak of the inevitable consequence of his message. Divisions are foreseen, and divisions and conflicts have been a constant reality because the Christian gospel makes great demands. The challenge is to continue to speak the truth with love in spite of opposition.

The reading about the prophet Jeremiah which accompanies this gospel illustrates the persecution often faced by the prophets. Jeremiah's intentions are misrepresented: he 'does not have the welfare of this people at heart'. He is thrown into a well and sinks into the mud. He is eventually rescued by someone who is willing to stand with him and risk persecution himself. As the Letter to the Hebrews says, we are supported by 'a great cloud of witnesses' as we continue the race of faith which we have begun.

Am I willing to speak the truth even when it might cause unpleasantness?

Am I prepared to suffer for my faith?

We pray for those who preach the good news despite opposition and persecution.

We pray for peace in the Church and in the world.