

## **Homily – Lk. 12: 49-53**

**20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C**

**14<sup>th</sup> August 2022**

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In 1980, in the midst of a U.S.-funded genocidal war against the so-called leftist rebels in El Salvador, Archbishop Saint Oscar Romero who sided with the poor-exploited farm workers, declared: “If they kill all your priests and the bishop too, each one of you must become God’s microphone, each one of you must become a prophet. I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people.”

Now, amid overarching violence, Romero wrote to Jimmy Carter the 39<sup>th</sup> President of the United States pleading with him to cease sending military aid to the brutal military regime because, he wrote: “it is being used to repress my people.” But Archbishop Romero’s letter went unheeded. And two months later, he was assassinated.

Well! Ending a long, yet powerful homily addressed to the pro-government landowners, peasants and the military, and broadcast throughout the country, Romero’s voice rose to breaking: “Brothers, each one of you is one of us. We are the same people. The farmers and peasants that you kill are your own brothers and sisters. When you hear the words of a man telling you to kill, think instead in the words of God: ‘Thou

shall not kill'. No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God." Then his voice burst out: "In the name of God and in the name of our tormented people who have suffered so much and whose laments cry out to heaven, I implore you, I beg you, I order you: "Stop the repression". Well! It was on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1980 that Oscar Romero gave his last homily, moments before a sharpshooter felled him at the altar of a hospital chapel. And reflecting on the day's Scripture, he had daringly said the following: "One must not love oneself so much, as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us, and those that fend off danger will lose their lives."

The central theme of today's readings is that we should courageously live out our religious convictions and principles in our lives, as Jeremiah, Paul and Jesus did, even if doing so should result in our martyrdom and turn our society upside down. And the readings keep reminding us that the Church of today needs prophets like Romero and they caution contemporary prophets that their course will not be easy either. If no one is ever offended by the quality of our commitment to Christ, that commitment may not be authentic, and if our individual and communal living of the Good News casts no fire and causes no division, then perhaps we are practicing an "inoffensive Christianity."

Jeremiah, in the first reading, is presented as experiencing the consequences of the burning word of God within him. His preaching divided the city and incited such opposition that people sought his death. He showed the courage of his prophetic conviction by telling King Zedekiah that the Lord God said he had to surrender to the mighty army of Babylonian empire to save Israel. The result was that Jeremiah was thrown into a deep, muddy cistern to die for his “treason.” And, Paul, in the second reading, challenges the Judeo-Christians to stand firm in their Faith in Jesus, ignoring the ostracism imposed on them by their own former Jewish community. Now, coming to the Gospel of today, we find Jesus addressing his disciples saying: “I have come to bring fire to the earth and how I wish it were blazing already”. And further he says: “Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division”.

Yes! Those who follow His teachings, Jesus warns, will be considered revolutionaries. And Jesus tells those of us who strive to follow Him today that when His message sinks into our hearts and minds, it can cause trouble even in our families, in our societies and at our workplaces and we can be rejected or despised for adhering to be a radical follower of Christ.

Well! The Kingdom of God that Jesus introduced was indeed quite radical. And his sense of justice brought him into conflict with those who exploited the weak and the poor. His integrity invited confrontation with the dishonest and hypocritical leaders, and his love for the poor, the sinners and the outcast alienated him from the narrow-minded and self-righteous.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who died in 1997, was definitely one of the most influential persons of our time. She was always on fire with the love of Christ, and she was so passionate about her beliefs that her life became an articulate expression of her Faith. She loved life, and was never afraid to stand her ground for what she believed. Thus, even when called to speak at the 1994 National Prayer Breakfast in Washington in the United States to a pre-dominantly American elite audience, she strongly criticized the policies of the government on life. Yes! Nothing could deter her from voicing her thoughts plainly and bluntly. At the end of her speech the crowd gave Mother Teresa a standing ovation and clapped profusely. Apparently, thirst overwhelmed Bill and Hillary Clinton at that very moment because while everyone else went in an uproar of applause the Clintons just sucked on their water bottles. Later when questioned, about Bill's meeting with Mother Teresa Bill's only response was this: "I cannot argue with a life that had been so well lived."

Well! On the day of our Baptism, all of us received the light of Christ and were instructed to keep that torch burning brightly until the return of Christ Jesus. Further, the Holy Spirit was sent into our hearts at Confirmation to help set us on fire. But, probably most of us or rather all of us have made compromises in our lives along the way and treated Christianity to make us feel good about ourselves. Often times, we want the Church to be a well maintained, quiet presence that never challenges lives. Instead, I believe as Christians, we should have the fire to inflame people to care, to serve, and to bless each other with all the gifts of Faith. We should work with the Holy Spirit to allow that fire to burn off the impurities in us and to bring out the purity of the gold and silver within us. We need Divine fire dear brothers and sisters to inflame our hearts with the love of God and love for His children.

And I conclude with the words of Pope Benedict XVI. He would say: “An ‘adult’ faith is not a Faith that follows the trends of fashion and the latest novelty; a mature adult faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ. It is this friendship that opens us up to all that is good and gives us a criterion by which to distinguish the true from the false, and deceit from truth”. And such a Faith dear friends will enable the fire of the Holy Spirit to burn in us and give us the courage of our Christian convictions. God bless you all, **Amen.**