

Homily-20th Sunday C, 2019

It must have been a very painful scene when young Celestine told his non-Christian parents that he has become a Christian. His small belongings were thrown out of the house and his Dad told him never to show his face again.

So, this young man who had just come home from the residential parish school for vacation about 20 miles away, returned to the parish school again walking another 20 miles as he had nowhere to go. All other relatives would have reacted the same way as his father did. His parents stopped giving him any money for his education.

In modern societies like here, one could live all by himself, and in a family, the members could follow different denomination or even different religion. But it is not so, in traditional societies like India. Where all the family members have to follow the same religion of the family and the tribe or caste otherwise at the time of social functions, like wedding and funeral nobody will be present. So, a dead person will have to literally bury himself.

So, this young man losing the family ties must have been very painful. But this boy never gave up his new found religion and continued to stay in the hostel of the parish residential school and did some part time job for the parish and thus was able to finish his high school. After High School he joined the seminary, then due to my initiative, Mr. Alan Mudd of the cathedral parish paid for his seminary education.

This seminarian is one of the five candidates, our bishop McKnight is going to Ordain on January 3rd when he visits my home diocese. I have visited the family of this seminarian during my last trip. The family members are still non-Christians but, now after the initial division and fire, the peace is settling down in the family and the family members are planning to get baptized either before the Ordination by their Deacon son or after his ordination by their priest son.

This is precisely a very literal example of what Jesus meant in the Gospel today when he said he came not to bring peace but division (Luke 12:51).

The central theme of today's readings is the price we have to pay for following Jesus.

In the first reading the prophet Jeremiah paid his price for speaking up God's words.

Jeremiah was a royal prophet. He was the prophet at the King's court. He should have been held with the deepest respect. But he refused to butter up the king by just telling the king what he and the people wanted to hear. Because Jeremiah stood for the truth, he

was berated and mocked.

In today's reading he was thrown into a cistern where he would have died if the King had not stood up against his own counselors and saved Jeremiah's life. Jeremiah's life should have been wonderful, beautiful, full of honor. But being true to the Word of God resulted in his being treated with contempt. The persecution which Jeremiah experienced was something that afflicted all the prophets due to their determination to stand up for God's word, to stand for what was right and good and true, no matter what others would say about them or do to them.

In the second reading St. Paul encourages the Jewish Christians who were also paying the price for abandoning their ancestral Jewish religion. Just like the example I gave of the young man in the diocese, these Jewish Christians were also rejected and ostracized by their fellow Jews, kicked out of synagogues and cut off from family and old friends. Paul encourages their faith by asking them to consider themselves as athletes running the race, *keeping their eyes fixed on Jesus the "leader and perfecter of our Faith.*

In today's Gospel, we are shocked when Jesus declares that he has come not to bring peace on earth but division, splitting even families apart. Jesus' teaching caused division in families, in communities and in the Church.

The disruption, division, and revolution, which Jesus and his true followers cause in society by the fire of sacrificial love and the fire of justice, are necessary to re-set what's fractured, put right what's dislocated and cleanse what's infected.

In other words, the curative pain caused by Jesus' ideas and ideals is necessary for the establishment of real *shalom* of God. It is just like painful radiation or chemo therapy before one could get cured of cancer.

So, let's be ready to pay the price for our faith just like this young man paid and Christian in many countries are paying some by sacrificing their lives.

And if some one of you be interested in helping some young seminarians you are welcome to contact me. The Knights of Columbus and one of parishioners are already doing so.