

"I have come to set the earth on fire."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, a young man was drafted into the Royal Air Force and found himself in a barracks with 29 other men. On the 1st night, he had to make a big decision. He had always knelt to say his prayers before climbing into bed at night. Should he continue to kneel and pray? He squirmed a bit.

"Why should I change just because people are watching? Am I going to begin my life away from home by letting other people dictate what I should and should not do?" He decided...to kneel.

By the time he had finished praying, he was aware that everyone was aware of him. **AND**, when he made the Sign of the Cross, he was aware that everyone knew he was Catholic. As it turned out, he was the only Catholic in the barracks. **Yet** ...night after night, he knelt. He spent those 10 mins. on his knees, which often led to discussions that lasted for hours.

On the last day of boot camp, someone said to him,

"You're the finest Christian I've ever met."

He replied,

"Well, I might be the most public Christian you have ever met, but I don't think I'm the finest. Still, I thank you for what you said."

That story beautifully illustrates a point of today's Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Luke.

What, exactly, is a point it beautifully illustrates in today's Gospel, you ask.

Well... I'm glad you asked that question!

*Put quite simply, it is: Commitment to Jesus Christ means taking a stand on certain things. And, sometimes, that stand sets us in opposition to other people. **BUT**...it's precisely this opposition that makes it possible for us to give the kind of witness Jesus talked about on the Sermon of the Mount. He said:*

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp & put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds & glorify your heavenly Father. Mt 5:14-16

Sometimes our commitment to Jesus will cause us to be persecuted, as Jeremiah was in the 1st reading. Sometimes it will cause us to struggle with others in life, as Paul notes in today's 2nd reading. Sometimes it may even cause us to oppose our own family, as Jesus warns in today's Gospel.

This was one of the reasons why early Romans hated Christianity so much. It tore their families apart. Once a son became a Christian, he could no longer join the others in pagan worship. He could no longer join at gladiatorial games to cheer-on 2 slaves, fighting each other to death. He could no longer join the others in encouraging his sister to let her crippled baby starve to death, rather than let it grow up impaired. He could no longer join his friends in orgies & other immoral activities that were so characteristic of Rome in its decadent years.

*Over & over, **Roman Christians** had to decide whether they loved kith and kin more than they loved Christ. And, often, this set them in opposition to their family.*

An example of such opposition occurs in the play, ***Fiddler on the Roof***. The story, as you may know, takes place in 1905-Russia. The plot centers around a man named Tevye, the father of a poor, Jewish family. Tevye has 5 daughters and no sons.

His eldest daughter marries a tailor, who was NOT chosen for her by the traditional matchmaker. After a struggle with his conscience, Tevye accepts the marriage.

His next daughter marries a college student, who has broken with many Jewish traditions. After another struggle with his conscience, Tevye accepts this marriage, too.

Finally, the 3rd daughter, Chava, marries a NON-Jew, a young Russian soldier. When Tevye's wife, Golde, breaks this news to him, Tevye says: ***"Chava is dead to us. We must forget her."***

Golde exits the stage and Tevye begins to sing a beautiful song called "Chavaleh." In it, he pours out his heart to God. He can't understand why Chava did what she did. At that moment, Chava appears & pleads with Tevye to accept her & her husband. Tevye looks up to heaven and says:

"How can I accept them? Can I deny everything I believe in? On the other hand, can I deny my own child? [BUT...if I deny everything I believe in]... if I try to bend that far...I will break. NO, Chava."

When Jesus invited people to follow him, he realized what he was asking of them. For some, it meant doing what Chava had to do. It meant leaving father, mother, and family.

In other words, commitment to Jesus has to take priority over everything, even commitment to our own family...if it ever came to that. This IS the message of today's readings. It's a message that is as important today as it was in the time of Jesus. The Christian's commitment to Jesus & the Father must take priority over everything else. The Christian's commitment to "light" and "truth" canNOT be compromised...in any way!

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp & put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds & glorify your heavenly Father. Mt 5:14-16"

I pray:

"Lord, give us the courage to follow you, even though it causes us to struggle, as Paul notes in today's 2nd reading.

Lord, give us the courage to follow you, even though it causes us to be persecuted, as Jeremiah was in today's 1st reading.

Lord, give us the courage to follow you, even though, sometimes, it sets us in opposition to our family, as Jesus warns us in today's Gospel."

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you...

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.