

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time—C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

In those days, the princes said to the king:
"Jeremiah ought to be put to death;
he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in this city,
and all the people, by speaking such things to them;
he is not interested in the welfare of our people,
but in their ruin."

King Zedekiah answered: "He is in your power";
for the king could do nothing with them.

And so they took Jeremiah
and threw him into the cistern of Prince Malchiah,
which was in the quarters of the guard,
letting him down with ropes.
There was no water in the cistern, only mud,
and Jeremiah sank into the mud.

Ebed-melech, a court official,
went there from the palace and said to him:
"My lord king,
these men have been at fault
in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah,
casting him into the cistern.
He will die of famine on the spot,
for there is no more food in the city."
Then the king ordered Ebed-melech the Cushite
to take three men along with him,
and draw the prophet Jeremiah out of the cistern before
he should die.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 40:2, 3, 4, 18

R. (14b) Lord, **come to my aid!**
I have waited, waited for the LORD,
and he stooped toward me.
R. **Lord, come to my aid!**

The LORD heard my cry.
He drew me out of the pit of destruction,
out of the mud of the swamp;
he set my feet upon a crag;
he made firm my steps.
R. **Lord, come to my aid!**

And he put a new song into my mouth,
a hymn to our God.
Many shall look on in awe
and trust in the LORD.
R. Lord, come to my aid!

Though I am afflicted and poor,
yet the LORD thinks of me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
O my God, hold not back!
R. Lord, come to my aid!

Reading 2

Hebrews 12:1-4

Brothers and sisters:
Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us
and persevere in running the race that lies before us
while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus,
the leader and perfecter of faith.
For the sake of the joy that lay before him
he endured the cross, despising its shame,
and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God.
Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners,
in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.
In your struggle against sin
you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

Alleluia

John 10:27

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord;
I know them, and they follow me.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 12:49-53

Jesus said to his disciples:

"I have come to set the earth on fire,

and how I wish it were already blazing!

There is a baptism with which I must be baptized,

and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!

Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth?

No, I tell you, but rather division.

From now on a household of five will be divided,

three against two and two against three;

a father will be divided against his son

and a son against his father,

a mother against her daughter

and a daughter against her mother,

a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law

and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Exegesis

Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

The Prophet Jeremiah was born in the year 650 B.C. in the small town of Anathoth just north of Jerusalem. He received his call to ministry as a prophet of Yahweh at the age of twenty-two in the year 628 during the reign of King Josiah. This was a turbulent time in both a political and a religious sense. Politically the great Assyrian Empire was on the decline and Babylon was on the rise. In the year 612 Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell to the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar, the warrior king of Babylon, carried off the first exiles from Jerusalem in the year 597. Jerusalem itself was destroyed in 587. Jeremiah remained in the rubble of Jerusalem for a time before he was deported into Egypt where he was murdered by his own people.

At the time that Jeremiah entered the scene there was widespread religious decline, idolatry and infidelity to Yahweh was the norm. In the year 622 the Book of the Law was discovered in the Temple, and Josiah led sweeping religious reforms bringing true cultic worship of Yahweh back to Jerusalem and Judah. The king had all the altars to foreign gods destroyed. The Prophet Jeremiah set the stage for this reform and was incredibly supportive of Josiah's actions.

In 609 King Josiah was killed in a battle at Megiddo. After his death idolatry swiftly returned to Israel and Judah. The territory was under Egyptian influence. King Neco of Egypt deposed Jehoahaz, king of the Northern Kingdom, and carried him off into captivity in Egypt. He then replaced him with Jehoiakim who reigned until 598 when he died, and his son Jehoiachin took over. The young king Jehoiachin was swiftly exiled into Babylon in 597 and King Nebuchadnezzar replaced him with Zedekiah who reigned until the fall of Jerusalem in 587.

Our pericope from the 38th Chapter describes the events that occurred during the reign of King Zedekiah and during the siege of Jerusalem (588-587). The prophesy of Jeremiah to the people that evoked the response of the King Zedekiah is as follows: *Thus says the Lord God: He who remains in this city (Jerusalem) shall die by the sword, or famine, or pestilence; but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live; his life shall be spared him as booty, and he shall live. Thus says the Lord: This city shall certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon; he shall capture it.* (Jer 38: 2-3). The charges that were brought against Jeremiah were that he was demoralizing the soldiers and the people by speaking the truth.

The incident of the arrest of the Prophet Jeremiah and his being tossed into the cistern occurred during a brief interruption of the siege of Jerusalem as mentioned in the previous chapter. "When the Chaldean army lifted the siege of Jerusalem at the threat of the army of Pharaoh..." (Jer 37: 11). Jeremiah had delivered a message to King Zedekiah that he did not want to hear. "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Give this answer to the king of Judah who sent you to me to consult me: Pharaoh's army which has set out to help you will return to its own land, Egypt. The Chaldeans shall return to the fight against this city; they shall capture it and destroy it with fire." (Jer 37: 7-8).

Early in his writings, Jeremiah reveals God to be the source of life using the image of *living waters*. "Two evils have my people done: they have forsaken Me, the source of living waters; they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water." (Jer 2:13). Again, immediately following our pericope the prophet writes: "O hope of Israel, O Lord, all who forsake you shall be in disgrace: the rebels of the land shall be put to shame; they have forsaken the source of living waters, the Lord." (Jer 17:13). In his Gospel, the beloved disciple John will quote Jesus several times using this image of living waters, e.g. the Samaritan Woman at the well. It is interesting that the Hebrew word for *hope* is *miqweh*, which also means *pool*, as in a pool of water. Jeremiah was tossed into a broken cistern, that was merely a pool of mud.

The prophesies of the Lord through Jeremiah came true. The city was besieged. "The Chaldeans set fire to the king's palace and the houses of the people and demolished the walls of Jerusalem." (Jer 39: 8). "As Zedekiah looked on, his sons were slain at Riblah by order of the king of Babylon, who slew all the nobles of Judah. He then blinded Zedekiah and bound him in chains to bring him to Babylon." (Jer 39: 6-7).

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 40:2, 3, 4, 18

The beginning of Psalm 40 is a hymn of thanksgiving. The psalmist sings of gratitude to God who hears our cries and who opens our ears that we may hear His voice. This two-way communication with God allows us to come to know God and ourselves. True delight as the psalmist proclaims is to come to know and do the will of God. It is about aligning our deepest desires with God's will for us, "To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and Your law is written in my heart." (Ps 40: 9). True happiness comes from oneness with God. For that we are grateful.

The final verses of the psalm (vs 12-18) turn into a prayer for Gods' continued deliverance.

I have waited, waited for the LORD, and he stooped toward me. The original Hebrew that is translated in this verse as *waited* is *yashab hedyudlamed*. The literal translation is *wait patiently*. The expression appears in Sacred Scripture in reference to God's grace and compassion that waits patiently for sinful humanity to return to Him. St. Peter uses the expression describing the patience of Christ: "For Christ also suffered for sins once... In it He also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been disobedient while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water." (1 Pt 3: 18-20). In reference to the patience of humanity the psalmist speaks of this human virtue: "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him." (Ps 37: 7). It is interesting to note that the root of the Hebrew word for *patience* describes a woman in labor, waiting for life to come forth. In addition, the root of the Hebrew word for compassion, which is often attributed to Yahweh, and to Jesus, also describes the womb, i.e., being connected as a child in the womb is to its mother, or children of the same womb.

The LORD heard my cry. He drew me out of the pit of destruction, out of the mud of the swamp; he set my feet upon a crag; he made firm my steps. The psalmist uses the image of the river ordeal, known from Mesopotamian literature. A person accused of wrongdoing is cast into a river for judgement; survival is an indication of innocence.¹ Throwing someone into a pit is also a recurring event in scripture, e.g., Joseph and Jeremiah. The Hebrew word(s) translated as *drew me out* is *alah* which means to draw out or cause to rise from. Being drawn up from the pit, e.g., Jeremiah, and especially Joseph after three days in the pit, certainly foreshadow the resurrection of Jesus after three days in the tomb. The Hebrew word translated as *crag* here is *sela*, usually translated as *rock*, also means *stronghold*. God is often referenced as *rock* in the OT to describe the immutability of God, His steadfast, unchanging faithfulness and love.

And he put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God. Many shall look on in awe and trust in the LORD. A more literal translation of the first half of this verse is as follows: He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. This hymn or song of praise in Hebrew is *tehillah*. *Tehillah* connotes an auditory expression of glory, praise and thanksgiving. The psalmist is exclaiming that it is God who put this expression of gratitude into his mouth. This is describing the dimension of gratitude that itself is a gift from God. God is love and gratitude is a dimension of love, and therefore, a gift from God. To the extent that we share in the divine life we possess, we participate in, the gift of gratitude. The Hebrew word that is translated as *awe* in this verse is *yirah*. Although, it is often translated as *fear*, in human response to God, it more appropriately describes reverence and awe. The salient point of this verse is that our outward expression of gratitude for the saving hand of God will bring others to reverence God.

Though I am afflicted and poor, yet the LORD thinks of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, hold not back! In his commentary on this verse St. Augustine writes: "The members of Christ—the Body of Christ extended everywhere—are asking of God, as one single person, one single poor man, and beggar! For He too was poor, who 'though He was rich, yet became poor, that ye through His poverty might be made rich.'"²

Lord, come to my aide! A more literal translation of this verse, inclusive of the first part, is as follows: "Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me!" This verse, selected as the psalm response, is verse fourteen. Psalm 40 turns at verse twelve from a hymn of gratitude and thanksgiving to a song of prayer to God for His continued deliverance. The Hebrew word translated as *deliver* is *neetsal*, which means to save, or to pull out of, rescue or deliver.

1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, N.Y.; page 532.

2. Augustine of Hippo; Exposition on the Book of Psalms; page 128.

Exegesis (Continued)

Hebrews 12:1-4

Our pericope, selected from the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, is taken from a section that is encouraging the faithful to persevere in their faith, to run the race with endurance. We have courage because we live the life of Christ and are guided by the example of the great men and women of faith who have gone before us.

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. The Greek word translated here as *witnesses* is *martys*. Although, it is unclear as to the actual date of the writing of *Hebrews*, most scholars date the book somewhere between the mid sixties and the early eighties. It is likely that the Roman persecution of the Church has begun. The author refers to a cloud of martyrs watching over those who are still in the “stadium” running the “race,” as if to be supporting them and encouraging them to the finish line. The cloud of martyrs also offer encouragement in that they have already completed and won the same “race” that we are now participating in.

Let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us. The Greek word for *burden* here is *onkos*, which is also translated as weight or impediment. Obviously, whatever is weighing us down must be removed and discarded in order to win the “endurance race.”

And persevere in running the race that lies before us. The Greek word that is translated here as *persevere* is *hyomone* which is often translated as *endurance* or *steadfastness*. In a previous chapter *Hebrews* speaks of the need for endurance. “You need endurance to do the will of God and receive what He has promised.” (Hb 10: 36). St. Paul reminds us that the goal is to win the race. “Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win.” (1 Cor 9: 24).

While keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. The introduction in *Hebrews* reminds us that Jesus is the perfecter of faith in that He accomplished purification from sins by His Passion. “In the past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, He spoke to us through a son, whom He made heir of all things and through whom He created the universe, who is the refulgence of His glory, the very imprint of His being, and who sustains all things by His mighty word. When He accomplished purification from sins, He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, so far superior to the angels, as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” (Hb 1: 1-4). “But we do see Jesus ‘crowned with glory and honor’ because He suffered death, He who ‘for a little while’ was made ‘lower than the angels,’ that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.” (Hb 2: 9).

For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Jesus Himself was made perfect through suffering. “For it is fitting that He, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader of their salvation perfect through suffering.” (Hb 2: 10). The psalmist spoke of Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father. “The Lord says to you, my Lord: ‘Take your throne at My right hand, while I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” (Ps 110: 1). Now He is sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. Christ is the goal of this life. He waits for us.

Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In humility and endurance Christ is our model. He died so that we might have life. The goal of the endurance “race” is eternal life. “We are not among those who draw back and perish, but among those who have faith and possess life.” (Hb 10: 19).

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 12:49-53

The entire Gospel selection for this weekend consists of the words of Jesus. It is important to keep in mind that the captured words of Jesus occur as Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to face His Passion. It is also important to note the eschatological themes that precede this pericope.

"I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!" A more literal translation of this verse is as follows: I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled!" The Greek word that is translated here as *blazing* or *kindled* is *anapto*. *Anapto* means to ignite or set ablaze, to start a fire. The image of casting a fire on the earth recalls the action of God against the false prophets of Baal as Elijah called on Yahweh. "Answer me, Lord! Answer me, that this people may know that You, Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to their senses. The Lord's fire came down and consumed the holocaust, wood, stones, and dust, and it lapped up the water in the trench." (1 Kgs 18: 37-38). The image of God as a consuming fire again appears in Deuteronomy: "Take heed, therefore, lest forgetting the covenant which the Lord, your God, has made with you, you fashion for yourselves against His command an idol in any form whatsoever. For the Lord, your God, is a consuming fire, a jealous God." (Deut 4: 23-24). Again, the occasion of this show of power from God appears when the people have strayed from the Covenant.

The image of God as fire first appears in Scripture in the appearance Yahweh in the burning bush. "There an angel of the Lord appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed... When the Lord (Yahweh) saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God (Yahweh) called out to him from the bush." (Ex 3: 2, 4). It is important to note that fire symbolizes the Lord's presence and is revelatory.

The image of fire as an instrument of God's refining and purifying power is also prevalent in Scripture. "But who will endure the day of His coming? And who will stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like the fuller's lyre. He will sit refining and purifying..." (Mal 3: 2-3). When Jesus was Himself tested in the desert by the devil, the Greek word for *tested* or *tempted* is *peirazō*. It is the same word that is used for the refining of metal. John the Baptist spoke of the refining fire that Jesus will baptize with. "He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." (Lk 3: 16-17).

St. Peter speaks of the refining fire as a gift: "In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Pt 1: 6-7).

Fire is also revealed in the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of love: "When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 2: 1-4).

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 12:49-53

Those who were present at Pentecost were not consumed by the fire; they were set ablaze by the power of the Holy Spirit. They were purified by the flame of love. The burning bush that Moses approached was not consumed, and neither was Moses consumed by the fire. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not consumed in the fiery furnace. “They walked about in the flames, singing to God and blessing the Lord... I see four men unfettered and unhurt, walking in the fire, and the fourth looks like a son of God.” (Dan 3: 24, 92). The point is that God and those in communion with God are not consumed by the refining fire.

There is a baptism with which I must be baptized. Obviously, Jesus is speaking of His passion, death, and resurrection.

Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. This statement is one of great paradox, as is the Cross. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He came to “guide our feet into the path of peace.” (Lk 1: 79). At His birth the angels praised God: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests.” (Lk 2: 14). Simion revealed the paradox. At the sight of the child Jesus he cried out: “Now, Master, You may let Your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation.” (Lk 2: 29-30). Moments later Simion revealed to Mary. “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.” (Lk 2: 34-35).

Love requires choice. Hearts are laid bare. Truth is revealed. Fire purifies. We are wheat or chaff. If we are not for Christ, then we are against Him.

Reflection

Our first reading today features the Prophet Jeremiah, who is being thrown into a cistern of mud because the people do not want to hear the truth. It is the message of God that Jeremiah cannot contain within himself: “Then within me is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in and I cannot!” (Jer 20:9) Earlier in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, God informed Jeremiah that he would be a vessel of His Word: “I am now making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them.” (Jer 5:14) A rebellious people are trying to put out the fire, but they cannot. It has become a raging “forest fire.” The fire literally fell upon Jerusalem as it was burned to the ground by the Babylonians.

In our Gospel this weekend, Jesus says, “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!” This reminds me of the tongues of fire at Pentecost. It also reminds me of the words of John the Baptist, “I am baptizing with water, one mightier than I is coming who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” I am reminded too of God’s presence to Moses in the burning bush and the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the desert to the Promised Land.

At Pentecost tongues of fire were seen as coming upon the people who were gathered. They were transformed by the experience. We can see that transformation in Peter and the other apostles. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. The mighty wind and the passionate fire were within them. Like a powerful wind and a raging forest fire, it could not be contained. It was bursting out of them. One of our great catholic theologians once described the Holy Spirit as “The whirl of love between the Father and the Son that cannot be contained but bursts out into all of creation.” I think that that is the fire that Jesus brought to earth and wishes to be blazing.

Several years ago, I adopted the practice of praying the Holy Spirit prayer during every Mass that I celebrated. I also began to pray that prayer before homily preparation and before Mass and silently as I walked out to deliver my homily. “Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us your faithful and enkindle within us the fire of Your love.” I quickly began to see the effects in my life and in the life of my parish family. I felt that my role as pastor was to continue to enkindle that fire within myself and within each of my parishioners. I prayed that it would blaze so powerfully that others would be warmed by its love and attracted to its light. Let the fire fall! Bring on a new Pentecost!

Yours in the Holy Spirit,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".

Personal Witness

I was blessed to be born into a very devout Catholic family. From a newborn I attended Mass and every devotion that my little country parish offered. One of my earliest childhood memories was of receiving ashes on Ash Wednesday. I was probably four or five years old. I remember being in line behind my grandpa and in front of my father. Unlike the communion line that we did not take part in, I was in line to receive ashes on my forehead. I will never forget those words, "Remember man that you are dust and unto dust you shall return." I recall feeling rather good about myself being called a man. I was not too happy about the *dust* part. Especially since I took a bath on Saturday night.

Ash Wednesday came in early spring. It was spring and every spring my father would burn the fields around the homestead. He probably had a little pyromania in his blood as he seemed to really enjoy this annual tradition. Inevitably the fire would get out of hand, jump the road, burn the machine shed, etc. Every year was an exciting adventure. The day that the burning permit was issued the local volunteer fire department went on high alert. There were reasons for this annual fiasco. First, the wood ticks were making their way into the area. They were thick in the spring in the tall grass. Burning the fields at the right time would almost eliminate them completely. And secondly, burning the old dead grass would make room for the spring grass to break through. And finally, the ashes provided good nutrition for the grass and wildflowers and some nice wild strawberries.

The next day it was always interesting as I would survey the damage. The fields were dark black covered with the morning dew. Mom loved it when we ran through the fields and tracked the black ashes into the house. Within a few days the first spring rain would come. If you sat and watched long enough you could literally see the field start to turn green. This is my favorite image for Ash Wednesday. If we burn off the old stuff in us that is choking us, if we burn off all that is separating us from God, ourselves, and others; then new life will have room to spring forth.

This provides a good image of the purifying fire of God's love. This fire is meant to burn off the old and make room for the new. The Spirit of God that we connect with will by its very nature flow in and through us and burst into the world as burning love.

The most powerful forest fire begins with a single spark, and so it is with love. The most trivial act of kindness can enkindle a blazing fire of love. Such it is with God. Let's set the world ablaze with love and let it begin with you and me.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".