

- *“I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!”*
- How do we take that? Does Jesus want our destruction?
- Of course not. It is not the fire of destruction, but the fire the purification of hearts and souls...and the fire of ardor for love for God...as He has that fire in His heart for us...for we remember St. Paul’s letter to Timothy, telling us that God: *“...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* (1Tim 2:4)
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- Our readings today have well-interlinked themes.
- Our first reading speaks of the persecution of the prophet Jeremiah by the Israelites of his time—persecution for standing by, and speaking, the truth that God had revealed to him.
- ...and Jesus warns us in the Gospel that to be faithful to God in our world will mean strife and division, even in families, as most of us have witnessed and have had to endure.
- But always...fidelity to God first and foremost; that can never be stressed enough.
- ...because God gives us our very existence...He suffers and dies upon the cross for us for our salvation...and is the source of all good and every good gift that we have—most especially salvation and eternal life.
- Family, friends...intellect, material possessions, nationality...life itself...all are given via the hand of God. Indeed, our very lives are sustained in each moment only by His will and His love for us.
- It seems obvious, then, that nothing whatever should take precedence over our fidelity to God and seeking that greater holiness in our lives that He longs to see in us...our washing and

bleaching of our baptismal garment to return to the day and the image in which we received that wonderful sacrament.

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- And following that theme, we have our second reading from the letter to the Hebrews, in which the author often compares the spiritual life to an athletic competition, and speaks of the “*great cloud of witnesses*” of angels and saints watching us in our spiritual struggles in life—our “cheering section” so to speak... who have “run the race” before us...and who have WON...like Katie Ledecky in the 800 meters: way out in front.
- The saints are our spiritual heroes and mentors—showing us how we are well able to win the race—by firmness of faith and unwavering fidelity.
  
- How does one train for any athletic event.
- You can’t lay on the couch eating Cheetos all day, and then go out to win the Boston marathon.
- You win by training. Practice, practice, practice.
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- In the same way, we win the spiritual contest that we are in—one which is inevitable—only by practice...to practice daily the virtues of charity, kindness, faithfulness to God. Forgiveness. Developing not “muscle memory” but rather “spiritual memory”—which is the habit of doing what is good...building that habit of virtue rather than vice, or even sloth.
- Practice makes perfect in all things, and most especially in the spiritual life.
- And it’s not a belt or trophy or a medal we’re called to win; it is life itself—eternal life with God.

- And everyone is given sufficient grace to win the race. It's more like a relay; there's not only one winner, but many—each putting forth the gifts given them with greatest effort...each assisted by one another.
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- We are all given all we need to win this race—God's grace, and His commandments. Like in many things, whether we win or lose is not an effort of muscle and strength, but rather that of will.
- The spiritual life may be more rightly compared to warfare than an athletic contest...for Satan wages a never-ending warfare against the children of God in His hatred for us...hating us because God has loved us and elevated us to a status equal to that of angels, which Satan himself enjoyed at one time, but forfeited in his disobedience—HIS rebellion—against God.
- What is our obedience? What is our love of God? Simply to love the Father by accepting His Son...accepting His sacrifice for us and His teaching...being obedient to His will...loving our neighbor...forgiving others. While it certainly takes effort because of our passions, none of this is really particularly difficult...except subduing our own will in preference to the will of God.
- As the prophet Micah tells us: *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (Mic 6:8 RSV)
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- Sometimes I'll see on Facebook or hear things like: “You'd better not cross me, or there'll be Hell to pay!”
- Where is Christ in that attitude? If we are never crossed, how can we ever prove ourselves by forgiving?

- If God took that attitude with us, none of us would last the day!
- THAT is the race that we are running—not for echoes of cheers that fade in a moment, but for love of God...the eternal cheers of that great cloud of witnesses whose prayers to God for us never fade and are never forgotten.
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- So...strengthened by the Heavenly nourishment of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist today...shun evil, and seek the good...as our second reading said: “...*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.*”
- We can’t keep our eyes on Jesus if we stay away from Him—if we don’t read what He teaches us in the Gospels, and if we don’t come to Him in the Holy Mass.
- Because here—and ONLY here in the Mass—is Jesus present in His absolute fullness—Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in His fullness in the Eucharist.
- No prayer, no devotion, can compare with the communion—the UNION—of God with us here...in the sacrifice of Christ for us.

**Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Lectionary: 120**

**Reading 1** [JER 38:4-6, 8-10](#)

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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** [PS 40:2, 3, 4, 18](#)

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**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** **HEB 12:1-4**

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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.

**Gospel** **LK 12:49-53**

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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.”