



20th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Date: Sunday, August 17, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: Jeremiah 38:4–6, 8–10

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:2–4, 18 | **Response:** Psalm 40:14b

Second Reading: Hebrews 12:1–4

Gospel Acclamation: John 10:27

Gospel Reading: Luke 12:49–53

Preached at: the Chapel of Richartz House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

[Homily for the Assumption for the Blessed Virgin Mary]

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace, mercy, and peace be with you all.

Imagine a flicker—tiny, trembling, uncertain—but alive. That flicker is the fire of the Gospel: the fire that Jesus longed to kindle upon the earth. It is the fire we hear burning through our readings today—a fire of truth that confronts, a fire of love that purifies, a fire of hope that endures.

In our first reading from the Book of Jeremiah, we encounter a prophet silenced not by argument but by violence. Jeremiah speaks an unwelcome truth: that surrender, not resistance, is the path to life. And for this he is thrown into a cistern—a pit of mud and despair. But God does not abandon him. An outsider, an Ethiopian court official named Ebed-melech, becomes his unexpected saviour. The name Ebed-melech means “servant of the king,” but he serves not merely a human monarch, but the divine Kingship of Justice. It is a subtle but powerful reminder that God’s grace often flows through the hands of those the world least expects. In a society obsessed with status and descent, the one who rescues the prophet is a foreigner and a eunuch.

The Psalm sings the same song Jeremiah must have whispered in the darkness: “He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock.” The psalmist, like Jeremiah, knows what it means to wait, to trust, to cry out from the depths. And the response is not thunder or spectacle, but a

steady hand, a secure footing, and a new song born of deliverance. This is the cry of those who have suffered yet are not destroyed, who have doubted yet are not lost. In Zimbabwe today, where many feel the drag of the economic mire, the heavy boots of corruption and injustice, the slow erosion of hope, this psalm is a promise: God sees, God hears, and God lifts.

But Jesus—ah, Jesus!—he speaks with the voice of fire. In the Gospel of Luke, he declares, “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” This is not the fire of condemnation, but the fire of Pentecost, the flame that transformed frightened fishermen into fearless apostles. It is the fire of passion, of urgency, of unyielding love. Yet, this fire divides. Not because God loves division, but because truth, when spoken clearly, unsettles lies. Peace built on injustice is not peace. Unity built on silence is not unity. Jesus exposes the false peace of pretending all is well. His fire reveals what must be healed.

In his world, as in ours, loyalty to kin often outweighs loyalty to conscience. But when family traditions clash with the Gospel, we are called to choose God. And that choice may cost us—our comfort, our reputation, even our relationships. Yet the Gospel is the only fire that frees. It does not destroy—it purifies.

This theme of perseverance continues in the Letter to the Hebrews: we are urged to run the race, to endure the struggle, to fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Around us is a great cloud of witnesses—ancestors, prophets, martyrs, saints—who whisper, “Keep going.” In our nation, where weariness is understandable and disillusionment common, this passage reminds us that Christian hope is not naive. It is defiant. It does not deny suffering—it outlasts it.

Now imagine, in Ignatian contemplation, standing beside Jeremiah as he sinks in the mire. Feel the cold, the fear, the abandonment. And then see the hands of Ebed-melech reaching down, not only with ropes, but with rags to cushion the prophet’s frail arms. Who in your life is in the pit? And who might you be called to lower yourself down to save?

Or picture Jesus standing before you, eyes aflame, voice trembling with urgency: “I came to bring fire.” What is that fire in your heart? What must it consume? What must it ignite?

In Zimbabwe today, we are called to be fire-bearers. Not incendiaries of division, but witnesses of a Gospel that demands more than silence. The fire of Christ calls us to stand with the poor, to speak uncomfortable truths, to dismantle the tribalism and prejudice that fracture our communities. It calls us to light candles of education where ignorance reigns, to fan into flame the dignity of those crushed by poverty. As Caritas reminds us, we are called to end poverty, promote justice, and restore dignity. This fire must burn through bureaucracy, through cynicism, through fear.

Like Ebed-melech, we are called to act—not when it’s safe, but when it’s right. Like Jeremiah, we are called to speak—not when it’s popular, but when it’s true. Like Christ, we are called to burn—not with hatred, but with holy love.

So as we leave this sacred space, may we carry that fire within us.

Three questions, to carry into your week:

- Where in my life am I resisting the fire Jesus brings—avoiding truth, avoiding change, avoiding love?
- Who in my world is stuck in the mire, and how might God be calling me to reach down with compassion and courage?
- What is one concrete action I can take this week to let the Gospel fire burn—in my home, my work, my community, or my country?

Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.