

August 17 & 18, 2019  
20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

All Saints Parish, Syracuse  
Fr. Fred Daley

### Rediscovering Fire

Last weekend, our Peter Daino shared a powerful homily on Biblical zeal – exilic zeal – that arises in two areas of the body: head and gut. Zeal in the head - the mind - results in vision; zeal in the gut – the heart – results in courage. Today’s readings from Jeremiah and Luke, express this zeal in the form of fire.

The Prophet Jeremiah didn’t end up in the bottom of that muddy well because he was predicting the weather incorrectly! The established powers threw him into that well because he was rocking the boat – disrupting the status quo – on fire with courage and zeal to proclaim God’s dream for the world. A few chapters earlier Jeremiah declares:

*“Within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones;  
I am weary with holding it in and I cannot!”*

This fire is not of Jeremiah’s making, but from God — for God’s purposes.

In our Gospel today from Luke, Jesus proclaims: “I have come to set the world the earth on fire. And how I wish it was already blazing! Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you; ...but rather division.”

Sisters and brothers, these are not measured words of someone following a game plan, but rather an impassioned outburst: an eruption of Jesus’ heart that reveals what drives him — one on a mission, impatient for it to be accomplished — driven to the point of anguish.

His belly, his gut is filled with fire — propelling fire — a fireplace there by God, his Abba.

As we reflect on so often in our Parish, Jesus was on fire with his vision... his mission of birthing the Reign of God — the Kindom — the realm of God here on earth... as in heaven; a vision for a new world... the world that God intended from the beginning. Jesus was on fire to make the impossible dream - a reality! And what a beautiful dream it is:

Jesus was on fire to create a world where *every person* and *all people* are seen, first and foremost, as precious works of art created in God’s image and likeness *without exception*.

Jesus was on fire to create a world where all people would have the necessities of life: food, water, clothing, education, and health-care; where all people would be treated with dignity and respect, a world free of injustice and prejudice and discrimination; racism, sexism, ableism and all the other ‘isms’ that divide us.

Jesus was on fire to preserve the world where all God’s Creation: the air, water, plants and animals (Yes..., including endangered species!) would be seen as sacred.

Jesus was on fire to birth a world of peace and nonviolence, where swords would be melted into plowshares... where there would be no more war.

But, sisters and brothers, Jesus wasn’t naïve... he knew that the dream – this vision – this world of God, is like a two-edged sword that divides people: father and son, mother and daughter-in-law, ....

Jesus, like Jeremiah, knew that what was “Good News” for some – the poor, the oppressed, powerless and marginalized – was interpreted as “Bad News” by the powerful the rich and the oppressors. Jesus knew that there would be some whose minds and bellies would be on fire with him and that there would be those who would put out the fire.

In fact, the dream of Jesus carried such division that the authorities ultimately assassinated him: Jesus became a victim of capital punishment by those in power who couldn’t handle his dream of a new world, a new creation: *the world God intended*.

But sisters and brothers, the Good News is: all the powers and principalities could not and cannot put out the fire! The fire still burns: the fire of the risen Jesus still burns in the minds and hearts of those committed to the reign of God — the realm of God — the Kindom of God on earth as in Heaven!

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Jeremiah and Jesus were the conscience of their communities; communities that were in deep crisis; communities that were approaching disaster: Jeremiah and Jesus had the vision to see what was coming...had the courage to proclaim it.

As followers of the risen Jesus in 2019, we are called to listen to those voices that challenge, the voices that are filled with the fire of the Word of God, if we too are to avoid disaster in our world, our nation, our church... .

One of the voices that challenges is the voice of our Pope Francis. Repeatedly since his election in 2013, Francis has been warning the church and the world of a wave of nationalism and populism that is sweeping through Europe and other places – including right here in the United States of America – a root cause of the racism and xenophobia leading to anti-immigrant sentiment.

Last Friday in an interview published in the Italian daily La Stampa, he made the shocking statement that the political rhetoric globally echoed that Nazi Germany:

*“I am concerned because we hear speeches that resemble those of Hitler in 1934. ‘Us first,’ ‘we..., we...’. These are frightening thoughts!”*

The Pope is stating these stark words in the face of Italy’s right-wing Interior Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini – the most powerful politician in Italy these days – who is calling for Italians to ‘put Italy first’ and is launching a crackdown on immigration. He has banned migrant rescue ships from docking in Italy and shut down a migrant center in Sicily that was once the largest in Europe.

Recently, in a press interview, Pope Francis stated that before World War II:

*“There was a people who was immersed in a crisis, who was searching for their identity until a charismatic leader came and promised to give them their identity back, and he gave them a distorted identity and we all know what happened.”*

Last Sunday evening at 6pm, a number of our Parishioners joined the Jewish Community of Central New York at a prayer vigil in front of the ICE Office on Salina Street: the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office – where under-documented immigrants are processed. Last Sunday, August 11 was the Day of Lamentations in the Jewish calendar: the saddest day in their liturgical year when the Jewish Community prayerfully reflects on their painful history: from the Exile, to the Holocaust, to present-day anti-Semitism. This vigil was one of some 50 held around our Nation and others around the world, but this time they interspersed into their prayer, statements that portrayed the present day suffering and victimization of the immigrants on our southern border.

Most prominent was a poster with words from the diary of Anne Frank... written in January of 1934, while in hiding:

*“Terrible things are happening outside. Any time of night and day, poor helpless people are being dragged out of their homes. ... Families are torn apart; men, women and children are separated. Children come home from school to find that their parents have disappeared.”*

We have reproduced these words next to the picture of the 11 or 12 year-old girl, begging the Customs Agents to return her father who was one of those arrested in the largest immigration raid in American history at that meat processing plant in Mississippi earlier this month. This poster will remain in our sanctuary to remind us of what is happening – “outside” – in our Nation this very moment ...in our name.

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At the end of a Homily I often ask the question: “What can we do?”

First: To discover that fire in our belly, that set Jeremiah and Jesus on fire, we need *to read the signs of the times through the lens of the Gospel, the Word of God, the vision of Jesus*. As disciples of Jesus we’re *required to do this*. We are Christian before we are liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican. If we watch Fox News we need to interpret Fox News through the vision of the Gospel. If we watch CNN, we must interpret it through the lens of the Gospel. In other words:

- what would Jesus do at our southern border?
- what would Jesus do in front of the ICE Office?
- what would Jesus do in a conversation with Congressman Katko or any politician and government official in the midst of this crisis?

Let us learn from the horrors of the past:

- a refugee ship overloaded with Jewish refugees was turned back at our border to return to the Nazi ovens...
- Anne Frank and her family were denied refugee status in the US three times...

Never again!

Second: You know the old saying: ‘Talk about anything at Thanksgiving dinner but religion and politics!’ Well, I don’t think Jesus would agree... in love we must dialogue with those who disagree – seeking the truth together. Our common denominator as Christians is the Gospel.

Third: With notable exceptions, the institutional church was pretty quiet during the horror of the Holocaust... . We need to challenge our Bishops (who, to date, have made pretty good statements on immigration) to raise their voices. (Personally, I have a call in to our new Bishop Lucia.)

Fourth: We can engage in works of mercy, working together with our Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition; our asylum family living with us in Sanctuary; our Refugee Welcoming Team ... (which, by the way, our garage sale next weekend will support! Details are in the Bulletin.)

Fifth: Share the Good News! How blessed our Parish is: since May 1<sup>st</sup>, *24 new folks* – arriving as refugees – have joined our Parish! [Among the first questions our newest family asked when being welcomed at Interfaith Works when they arrived was “Where is All Saints?”] Among the very practical ways we can support these folks is by helping to provide the rides to the Parish for Mass and other activities. Soon we may have to make a decision about acquiring a second van...!

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I close with the powerful words of theologian and scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin:

“The day will come when after harnessing space,  
the winds, the tides and gravitation,  
we shall harness for God the energies of love.  
And on that day, for the second time  
in history of the world –  
we shall have discovered fire!

Amen