

20th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez at
Blessed John Paul II Mission and Mary Queen of Heaven Church
August 17 & 18, 2013

Fire is destructive. How painful when firefighters die as it happened few weeks ago in Phoenix, Arizona. The other day I was looking at a picture of the Church of the Immaculate Conception in downtown Jacksonville after the fire of 1891. I was amazed at the total devastation of the building except the walls and the image of Our Lady on the top preserved.

And yet Jesus says how I wish I set the world on fire!

In reality fire is both a symbol of destruction and paradoxically of love. Jesus wants to transform all things with the fire of the Holy Spirit: The Spirit of truth and love.

Jesus' dream is to set in motion a kingdom of truth and love, life and justice. It was so refreshing to see Pope Francis, the Vicar of Christ fire up two million young people with the light of the Gospel.

We pray daily: Thy Kingdom Come, but its coming requires a long process of assimilation, of active listening, for the truth to take root in our hearts.

Jeremiah prepared Jesus' coming in the same manner as John the Baptizer with an audience that wasn't always receptive to his message. Why was John the Baptist martyred? He dared to say the truth about marriage to the powerful.

Why such a gentle, peaceful man as Jeremiah was so persecuted? Why was he put at the bottom of a cistern to die of hunger?

Because he was not as we say today "politically correct." He spoke the truth to the powerful. Jeremiah incarnates the principle: when violent people do not like the message they kill the messenger.

There is no greater fear than the fear of the truth. To walk in the light of truth is to wipe out any double standard, dissimulation, duplicity and hypocrisy. It is never lying.

Yet there is such joy in walking in the truth in living in a good conscience. Teens discover Christ as the truth, the way and the life and their lives are on fire...that explains why we are having so many vocations.

The struggle of walking in the light can be heard in the message of the Letter to the Hebrews: let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere...

The Christian today needs to fix his eyes on Jesus. The Master tells us: learn from Me we need you to fight on three fronts:

1. **The sacredness of marriage.** God has a plan that is very good for the human couple, male and female. We are in need of persuasive conversations that affirm marriage in a language that is effective. And it needs to be done by the lay faithful. Each child needs his father and mother to grow properly. We need a marriage crusade that will solve the crisis experienced at home, which is more important than the housing market.
2. **The absolute presence of God at the center.** Secularists are passing on the lie that God does not matter in the public square. The believer needs to witness by word and deed that God is essential to the city. As a founding father of our country said: religion and morality are essential to our prosperity. In God we trust, do not forget.
3. **We need to protect the right of religious freedom in our country and in the world.** Our conscience leads us to worship and to witness our faith and morals without any pressure from the state or the dominant media. The fact is that believers are persecuted because of their faith when that faith is shared in public. Why is it that all kinds of weird practices are acceptable while praying or giving a blessing is outmoded?

We want a future where God is respected, honored, as our greatest good. The Glory of God is man fully alive, says St. Irenaeus.

When John Paul died, there was a cry of the people: *santo subito!!* They were right; he will receive the title of saint for the glory of God. He proclaimed unceasingly the truth about the dignity of the human person, the truth of Jesus Christ and his body the church. He was a world messenger of truth and love particularly of love as mercy.

St. Augustin of Hippo chose a pierced heart as a symbol of his Coat of Arms. The heart of Christ burning in fire – the fire of love blazing the entire world.

I have come to set the Earth on fire and how I wish it were already blazing! The truth will set you free!