

Have you ever noticed how many warning signs you pass by every day? Signs like "Do Not Enter," "School Crossing," "Caution: Wet Floor." In our Bible passage for today Jesus has a warning for his followers. The warning is this: if we choose him as our Savior and Lord, then we may very well face criticism and rejection, in our most intimate circles, even from our families.

As we heard in the First Reading, the Prophet Jeremiah learned this lesson well. He lived at a difficult time in history of Israel. Judah where Jerusalem was located was right **between** two powerful empires that were trying to conquer the whole area: Egypt in the south and Babylon in the north. Jeremiah's mission in life was to be prophet, to constantly remind the people and rulers of Judah **to trust in God**.

Unfortunately, neither the leaders nor the people wanted to hear that. Instead, they wanted to take matters into their own hands, fight their own battles, and arrange their own peace treaties. So eventually Judah was conquered by Babylon, Jerusalem was ransacked, and the Jews were taken into exile. Then they blamed it all on Jeremiah. They spread lies about him, they mocked him, burned his writings, and finally put him in prison. Why? Simply because he was being faithful to what God was asking of him. Yes, choosing to follow Christ in a fallen world has consequences, and God wants us to be ready for them.

Our second reading from the *Letter to the Hebrews* exhorts us to imitate the zeal, courage, and fortitude that Jesus showed in the face of 'opposition from sinners'. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to continue his mission in the service of God's reign. Like him, we will meet with opposition and even rejection. We may not have 'to keep fighting to the point of death' but we cannot avoid the cross in one form or another.

Just to give you an example, we had a Priest in our community. He was from a high cast Hindu family. At one point in his life, he decided to receive baptism and become a catholic. This was not taken well by his family who were traditional Hindus. To make matters worse, he decided to become a priest. At his ordination, he was disowned by his family. He could never enter his home again. Even at the death of his own mother, the family refused him to come for the funeral rites. This is what Jesus says there will be division even in families for my sake.

Scholars tell us that Jesus is speaking here not about the **purpose** of his coming but about the inevitable **consequence** of his coming. Jesus came to reveal the true sons and daughters of God who listen to God's word, and the children of this world who oppose God design. This divides all humankind into two camps, the camp of the godly and the camp of the ungodly. There is perpetual conflict, a state of war, between these two groups as one group strives to raise the world up to God and the other to pull it down to hell. This is what we are seeing right now in our country with the verdict of the supreme court overturning Roe v Wade judgment. These two groups do not live in two different parts of the world, they live side by side in the

same neighborhood, they live together under the same roof, and in fact the forces of good and evil often exist together in the same person.

The holy war to which Christ calls us, therefore, is not a war against people of certain nationalities or cultures, creeds, or ideologies, but a war in which we have to identify the forces for evil in our own persons and in the persons of those who are dear to us (our family) and then declare an uncompromising war against these forces. Jesus uses strong words in today's gospel: "I have come to set the earth on fire... Do you think that I have come to establish peace on earth? (Meaning compromise) No, but rather division."

The Christian's resistance against sin, all that is evil, is an ongoing inner battle. Examples of the inner conflict may involve making a resolution not to swear anymore. Yet, when getting upset, the person instantly swears again. It may include a self-promise to spend more time with one's children as a loving parent but when other things come up, such things are placed first. It may involve making a resolution to no longer miss the celebration of the Holy Mass on Sundays. But when the time comes to get out of bed on Sunday morning, that is a different story. These and many more are examples of the inner battle. While we want to be good and spiritual in all our actions, our human nature interferes and draws us towards the worldly ways. As such, we must constantly be on the alert and strengthen our wills by resisting what is not Christian.

What are some of these evil forces that we are asked to war against? They are the seven deadly sins.

1. **Pride** (superiority complex),
2. **Covetousness** (greed, seeking material prosperity at the expense of one's soul),
3. **Lust** (sexual abuse, pornography, treating women as objects of pleasure),
4. **Anger** (bitterness, hate, bearing grudges),
5. **Gluttony** (excessive eating and drinking),
6. **Envy** (self-hate, rivalry),
7. **Sloth** (seeking success without working for it).

Christianity is loyalty. It is not a theory or an ideology, but it is a faith in the person of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. It is the imitation of His life, teachings, and sacrifice on the cross. Are we loyal to Jesus Christ? We should be prepared for some roughness. The enemy is also fighting against us, and we may have to suffer some harm or hardship. God never abandons his people. He will not abandon us if we fight His holy war — the war against evil in ourselves and in the world.

God Bless You.