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20 THURSDAYThursday, 29<sup>th</sup> WEEK of the YEAR

Rom 6: 19 - 23

Ps 1: 1 – 4, 6

Luke 12: 49 -53

Many Christians and non-Christians too, have a picture of Jesus as meek, mild and gentle. Popular 'holy pictures' may even give an effeminate impression of Him. And it's St Luke's gospel that usually portrays His more kindly and humanly warm aspects. All the more surprise, therefore, to hear today's gospel reading, which seems to contradict an accepted image of Jesus as a man of peace. These verses are maybe a bit awkward to understand: and we don't often hear them quoted. What is this "fire" He says He's come to bring on earth? And why "division" rather than "peace"? Because this saying of Jesus seems harsh and in contradiction to the image of the "gentle Jesus", it's important to take it seriously and try to understand and not gloss over it. First, the "fire" He talks about is clearly symbolic. But does He mean the Holy Spirit (St Luke's gospel more than others refers to the Spirit), or perhaps the fire that will purify hearts and must be lit on the Cross (which is suggested by His following words about the baptism He must still receive), or perhaps the state of conflict that His coming on earth has stirred up? The conflict, divisions, among families and friends because of Jesus is a reality among us, for faith in Him does create tension, lack of understanding and sometimes strong opposition. The peace that Jesus wished on His followers doesn't mean an absence of division and conflict. Rather, it's His Easter gift: of unity and life-sharing with His friends/followers.

May the fire of this peace grow in us and draw into its circle all our friends and family who haven't yet come to know Jesus.