Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses …” (Heb 12:1).

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jer 38: 4-6, 8-10; Ps 40; Heb 12:1-4; Luke 12:49-53

Jesus predicts great tensions and divisions along generational lines and even within families as the challenge of change confronts the world because of his preaching. Something new was happening, and it confronted older structures and attitudes. To be a follower of Jesus meant stepping apart from your family and religious identity. New wine was being poured into new and flexible wineskins. A new world was challenging the old; entrenched leadership faced a new generation of visionaries and dreamers.

We know that the gospels were being composed as profound changes were taking place in the Mediterranean world. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE and a tumultuous diaspora took place from the region into North Africa and Asia Minor. New Christian communities were being formed by missionaries like St. Paul, made up of Jewish and gentile converts. This process must have produced the family divisions Luke describes in today’s gospel passage. Just as Jesus had spoken of the baptism of fire he had to endure to pass from death to new life, so the church faced a similar paschal passage of radical surrender and change.

While every time of growth is about change, some periods in history seem particularly moved by forces that converge all at once to push renewal into rapid shifts and confrontations. We are in such a period, driven by technological innovation and self-conscious awareness of global change. We see it in the

environmental crises, movement of populations due to war and political upheaval, rising expectations and as concerns about our survival. How we respond will determine whether the world enters into a new era of shared prosperity and balance or into a long period of protracted competition and conflict.

We are not alone, for a great crowd of witnesses surrounds us made up of those who have endured similar challenges in the past and who now encourage us to be bold and confident that God is guiding history toward the beloved community creation was meant to be. Our eucharistic gatherings, made up of the great diversity of a changing world, are meant to be models of how this blessed community is both possible and necessary. There is room at the table for everyone and infinite love available if we keep our eyes on the prize that is Jesus, whose baptism is our baptism, whose glory is our promised destiny.

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