

A reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The officials said to the king,  
 “This man ought to be put to death,  
 because he is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city,  
 and all the people,  
 by speaking such words to them.

For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people,  
 but their harm.”

King Zedekiah said,

“Here he is; he is in your hands;  
 for the king is powerless against you.”

So they took Jeremiah

and threw him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king’s son,  
 which was in the court of the guard,  
 letting Jeremiah down by ropes.

Malchiah = mal-**KIGH**-ya

Now there was no water in the cistern, but only mud,  
 and Jeremiah sank in the mud.

Ebed-melech = ee-bed-**MEE**-lek

So Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, an officer in the king’s house,  
 left the king’s house and spoke to the king,

“My lord king,

these men have acted wickedly  
 in all they did to the prophet Jeremiah  
 by throwing him into the cistern to die there of hunger,  
 for there is no bread left in the city.”

Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian,

“Take three men with you from here,  
 and pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern  
 before he dies.”

Pause for **THREE** seconds  
 then look up at the people  
 and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,  
let us also lay aside every weight  
and the sin that clings so closely,  
and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,  
looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,  
who for the sake of the joy that was set before him  
endured the Cross,  
disregarding its shame,  
and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.  
Consider Jesus who endured such hostility against himself from sinners,  
so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.  
In your struggle against sin  
you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.



Pause for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – C 20

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

Jesus said to his disciples:

“I came to bring fire to the earth,

and how I wish it were already kindled!

I have a baptism with which to be baptized,

and what stress I am under until it is completed!

Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?

No, I tell you, but rather division!

From now on five in one household will be divided,

three against two and two against three;

they will be divided:

father against son and son against father,

mother against daughter and daughter against mother,

mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law

and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

### Reading I: Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

This is the episode of Jeremiah in the muddy cistern. Jeremiah has been predicting the impending destruction of Jerusalem as a judgment from YHWH.

Quite naturally, the government regards this kind of talk as defeatist and treasonable, so it seeks to silence Jeremiah by lowering him into a muddy cistern. But on this occasion his life is spared through the good offices of Ebedmelech the Ethiopian.

The caption, “You bore me to be a man of strife for the whole world,” which comes, not from this reading, but from Jeremiah's prayer (Jer 15:10, though the meaning there is probably “the whole land,” that is, Judah, rather than “the whole world”), indicates that our interpretation of this reading today should concentrate, not upon Jeremiah's deliverance, but upon the fact that his proclamation of the word of YHWH brought him rejection and suffering.

Thus, the passion of Jeremiah foreshadows the passion of Jesus, adumbrated in the Gospel reading.

### Responsorial Psalm: 40:2, 3, 4, 18

A different selection of verses from this psalm is used on the second Sunday of the year in series A and is commented upon there. The reference to the “miry bog” in the second stanza links the psalm with the first reading.

However, the main point today is the deliverance of the psalmist, whereas the main point of the Old Testament reading, as we saw from the caption and the gospel, lies in the rejection that results from being a bearer of the word of God.

### Reading II: Hebrews 12:1-4

This is the exhortation concluding the roll call of Old Testament heroes of the faith. They were “witnesses” to the power of faith to endure against every temptation to apostasy.

The author of Hebrews pictures the Old Testament worthies as a host (“cloud”—a good classical Greek term) of spectators standing by a racetrack and cheering on those who are now running the same race as they did in their day.

The race we have to run is “set before us,” that is, we have been entered for it (cf. the New English Bible) at our baptism.

Like athletes stripping for the contest, we must strip ourselves of the constriction (this is the connotation of the adjective translated “which clings so closely”) of sin.

But there is one who is even greater than the heroes of the Old Testament—Jesus, here described as the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”

In his earthly life he was the pioneer because he initiated the way of faith—the way through suffering to glory (v. 2b)—and its perfecter because he completed it, thus enabling believers to run the same race, through suffering to glory.

In the second paragraph of our reading, which begins a new section of Hebrews, the writer returns, as so often throughout his work, from Christological exposition to ethical exhortation bearing directly on the situation in the church to which he is writing.

These believers were subject to hostility from their neighbors (pagan? Jewish?), but none of them have had to suffer martyrdom yet.

Gospel: Luke 12:49-53

The reading falls into two parts. The first (Lk 12:49-50) speaks of Christ's divine destiny to endure suffering. This first block of material is peculiar to Luke.

The second part (Lk 12:51-53) speaks of the breakup of families caused by Christ and his message. This second block of material is paralleled in Matt 10:34-35.

We will first consider the two parts separately and then discuss the implications for Luke's theology of his procedure in bringing them together.

The first part consists of two “I sayings,” in which Jesus speaks of his mission as an accomplished fact. The first saying may well be authentic to Jesus, expressing his consciousness of prophetic mission, whereas the second saying, which refers to his martyrdom as a baptism (cf. Mk 10:38), looks like a vaticinium ex eventu, reflecting Christian baptismal theology (cf. Rom 6).

This second saying is probably an amplification of the first authentic “I saying” by the early Church. The “fire” (a symbol of eschatological judgment) that Jesus came to cast upon the earth will be his call to decision in face of his eschatological message.

The Church's additional “I saying,” with its explicit reference to Jesus' death, will mean that after Easter Jesus' eschatological message was replaced by the Church's kerygma of the cross. This kerygma, too, calls for a decision.

The second (Q) saying, about the breakup of family ties, reflects an apocalyptic tradition going back to Micah 7:6. “Social disruption has always been associated in the oriental mind with the reign of terror which will precede the age of salvation, and it is not surprising that it figures in Jewish apocalyptic as one of the signs of the end” (J. Jeremias).

It is difficult to be certain whether this saying goes back to Jesus himself or only to the post-Easter community. The situation, however, was found both in Jesus' ministry as a

result of his call to decision and in the post-Easter community as a result of its kerygma of the cross.

By putting together these two traditions—the two “I sayings” and the saying about family divisions—Luke shows that the breakup of families is a consequence precisely of the kerygma of the cross.

Luke has recently been criticized and downgraded for having no theology of the cross. It is true that he does not, like Paul and Mark, speak of the cross as an atoning death—but see Luke 22:19b-20 [“. . . which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"], which is now generally regarded as authentically Lucan and not a textual addition, and which shows that Luke was familiar with the idea of atonement in liturgy.

Even though Luke does not appropriate the language of atonement for his own theology, he does have his own theology of the cross. It is that the cross is for Christ the divinely willed pathway to glory (see Lk 24:26).

Believers in turn are drawn into the same pathway of suffering (see the second part of our reading). This suffering may take various forms: rejection, ostracism from family and society, and, though this is not specified here, martyrdom.

Reginald H. Fuller