

**Homily - 24th October 2013**

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**WUCWO IFCA and Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem**

***Women Believers at the Service of LIFE, DIGNITY and the COMMON GOOD***

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The Gospel passage we have just heard seems to contradict the message of Jesus. In fact, Jesus preached love of neighbor, he asked us even to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek. Before taking leave of his disciples he said: "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you*" (Jn 14:27), . He asked us to take the initiative of reconciliation with our brethren: "*If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift*" (Mt 5:23-24). The commandment, which we can consider as his will and that he himself describes as "mine" and "new", is unequivocal: "*I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another*" (Jn 13:34), to the point that Jesus even stated: "*This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*" (Jn 13:35). How do you explain, then, that Jesus said that he came to bring division?

The division of which Jesus speaks is not the goal of his teaching but can be the consequence for those who try to put it into practice. From the few passages I quoted above, it is very clear that Jesus' message is one of reconciliation, but following Jesus involves choices that sometimes are not understood or accepted, choices that are against the current: "*If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first*" (John 15:18); "*If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you*" (Jn 15:20). It is quite obvious that Jesus does not wish this persecution for his disciples, but he foresees it as a consequence of the choice they make for him. In fact, he adds: "*If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you*" (Jn 15:19). What Jesus asks for is consistency, even at the cost of being misunderstood, even if this lack of understanding, this rejection should come within our own family, in the circle of our own friends and results in a division from them. The surprising statement heard in today's Gospel passage is in the line of those strong words: "*If any one comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple*" (Lk 14:26) .

We know that this use of the verb "hate" really means "to postpone" all things to Jesus. One must postpone even one's dearest affections, even one's own life. The Christian is called to place Jesus first over everything, ready to face, for following Him, the most terrible consequences, the most painful misunderstandings.

The Christians living in this region know well what this means. And those who make the choice to convert to Christianity know it even better. Joseph Fabelle, an Iraqi man, shared in the book "*The price to pay*" his striking adventure to follow Jesus, the difficulties he faced as a result of his choice, the hostility of his family. He had to pay his courageous decision to follow Jesus by being jailed, then with an assassination attempt and, finally, with exile. He has experienced, on his own skin, what it means:

"Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth?"

*No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three".*

Division, I repeat, is not desired by Jesus, but it must be expected. It is the result of a choice opposed by those who do not accept that we can follow Him.

Before talking about divisions, Jesus us speak of fire: *"I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!"* It is precisely the fire which is divisive, which creates separation. A Christian who is not enflamed, it is a lukewarm Christian, ready to make compromises, while his or her life becomes meaningless. Jesus does not want, us to renounce our identity for the sake of a quiet life, or to seek a peaceful coexistence that requires renouncing our identity or denying that we belong to Him. This does not mean that we must be aggressive or feel pressured to proselytize. For being enflamed, in fact, it is necessary first of all to burn ourselves. We must burn away "our old man", our selfishness, our pride, our own comfort. When one burns for love of God and neighbor, one becomes a fire which spreads light and heat. One does not need to convince someone about the good choice he made, one's life becomes attractive. Look to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, wasn't she on fire? Look to Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Vincent de' Paul, weren't they fire? And what about all the saints who put themselves at the service of the poor and suffering people? How many people were attracted to Christ by them and by those who followed them! Yet they never tried to convince someone with arguments, much less to impose their truth by violence. The strength of their life was the attraction of good witness. Even a small fire, though small, if kept alive, catch on widely and spread.

We are called to unleash a fire, a fire of love. But how? We cannot expect to infect those who are far away. We should start with those who are closest to us, with those who live under our roof, who work next door to our office, who we meet on the street or at the market. Many times, it is enough to offer a smile, to extend a greeting, to shake a hand, to forgive an offense. So many little things that are contagious. *"Where you do not find love, put love, and you'll find love"* said St. John of the Cross. From little things we recognize great people. The fire spreads burning what is near, what comes into contact with it, not what is far away. We should not leave anyone indifferent of those who pass by us every day. Let's ask ourselves whether those who meet us realize that our heart burns with love.

Being fire means, therefore, burning with love for God and neighbor. A Christian who does not burn perhaps has found a way of living that is good for all, but his or her life may become insignificant.

Let us ask the Lord to make our hearts burn, as the heart of the disciples of Emmaus were as they walked and talked with Jesus. Let us be his true witnesses.