

THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS WITH HELEN

17 AUGUST 2025

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

First Reading: Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

Second Reading: Hebrews 12:1-4

Gospel: Luke: 12:49-53

THOUGHTS FROM THE WORD

Have you ever tried to “keep the peace” between two disagreeing parties? Or kept quiet instead of speaking out? I know my mother always said: “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all!” But - Is that really the appropriate or most helpful thing to do?

Sometimes, when we avoid letting our real feelings be known we can end up feeling like doormats: unappreciated, with people “walking all over us”. Sometimes the effect might be that we end up alienating ourselves from the very person whose relationship we are trying to maintain. Not letting real feelings be known is truly counter-productive and a barrier to dialogue.

Thinking about the Church’s move towards Synodality; it will mean that we will disagree at times with other members of the Church. However, if we all just agree, without constructive discussion and differing points of view, then the whole process will just be a talk fest with no real progress. Whether it is work or Church or home, ideally, members of groups or teams will bring diverse points of view to the table and have the courage to express them in a safe environment.

We have to be real: real feelings expressed, real perspectives shared, real listening and discussion, real action going forward.

This week’s scriptures command us to be real. We need to progress towards an unknown future, moving from old to new and from death to life.

Our First Reading from Jeremiah recounts an event of real movement from death to life. Jeremiah is a stirrer. He is agitating amongst the people and for this he is condemned to die in a well. His fate is thwarted by the Ethiopian, Ebed-Melech who somehow sees the power of Jeremiah’s words and becomes his saviour.

Jesus, in the Gospel text shows that he too is a stirrer. Powerfully, Jesus speaks that he has not come to bring complacency and peace but to bring the powerful “fire” of the Holy Spirit. Jesus shows his impatience. He wants to bring about change and the only way to do that is to upset the status quo. Jesus wants his followers to know that this will bring conflict and probably death, but no life can be transformed if there is no death.

Paul encourages us to focus on the bigger picture. Followers of Jesus need to cast off things that prevent us from being real, to keep Jesus as our focus, and to strive towards a better, more loving and compassionate future. That is worth upsetting the status quo.

I think that this is what Pope Francis had in mind when he taught that we must be a Church on the move, a missionary Church that is more authentic as a field hospital than in the basilicas.

Currently I am reading Pope Leo XIV by Christopher White, an American who is a Vatican journalist. The first third of the book is about Francis and how he paved the way for the new papacy. I think we can clearly describe Francis as a STIRRER! With capital letters!

Somewhat impatiently, Francis’ whole papacy was about crashing through all the things that he felt held the papacy back from being authentic and moving forward to a Church where all are welcome: Todos! Todos! Todos!

Discarding traditional dress (dress-ups he would say). Breaking with travel traditions and restrictions, not living in the papal apartments, driving himself in a little car around Rome, wearing worn shoes, blessing prisoners of both genders on Holy Thursday, blessing same-sex couples, sharing Church leadership with women. These were all things that Francis did to rid himself and the papacy of trappings that separated him from the people and especially from the poor and marginalised. Francis saw the Church as a real reflection of life as it is lived today rather than some fairytale perfect society.

Francis had many supporters but also many critics. These critics would like to undo the things Francis did. Has Francis thwarted this by mentoring Leo to bring about patient change with a longer term mission?

When we reflect on the Reading this week let’s think of the ways we need to be stirrers in life. What are the things that are holding us back and what new fire of the Holy Spirit can we bring to ourselves and our world?

MEDITATION

What needs to be stirred up in our lives?

- Sit in a quiet place and make yourself comfortable.
- Allow your breathing to become normal and natural.
- Imagine the Holy Spirit as a fire warming your heart and spreading out into your chest.
- Let the warmth of that Spirit reach down to the tips of our fingers.
- Imagine the warmth travelling through your body and slowly down to your toes.
- Relax in that warmth.
- Pause
- Ask: What do I need to stir up in my life?
- Pause
- Think of Jesus saying "Oh how I wish it were burning already".
- Ask: How can I burn with the Holy Spirit?
- Pause: Stay with that feeling of burning warmth.
- After a few minutes, give thanks for any insights or graces given.

PRAYER

We bring our prayers and our needs to the God who loves stirrers and those who discard things that tie people down, keeping us from moving forward.

INTERCESSIONS

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

For long term authentic change in our Church, we pray:

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

For all who have chosen to live an authentic religious life, we pray:

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

That like Jeremiah our words might create questioning and discernment, we pray:

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

For all parents who seek to teach their children about an ethical and compassionate life, we pray:

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

That there will be authentic dialogue between nations, especially those in conflict, we pray:

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

For a real solution for Pacific Islands threatened by rising sea levels due to climate change, we pray:

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

That the homeless may find a home, we pray:

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

That all young people will learn how to discern authentic truth, we pray:

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

For all victims of crime, we pray:

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

For our own needs, PAUSE, we pray:

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, burn in our lives.

Holy Spirit of Love, burn in our hearts. Free us from all that holds us back and give us courage to change even when it means that we will face resistance and conflict. Increase in us the power of true dialogue and synodality. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

REFERENCE

White, C. (2025) *Pope Leo XVI. Inside the Conclave and the Dawn of a New Papacy*. Garrat Publishing. Mulgrave, Melbourne.



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Helen has three adult children and four grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Edithvale, Victoria.