August 14, 2016 12:00 Noon Immaculate Conception, Hartford

**Annual Diocesan Fiesta----20th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Theme: “Day of the Family”**

My sisters and brothers in Christ, I welcome you here this afternoon on this very hot day to celebrate the annual Diocesan Fiesta. I really look forward to this happy event every year. And this year, as you can see, I’m attempting to preach my Homily in Spanish. So, even before I get started, I ask your patience with me in case I mis-pronounce a word or two, or more.

I am so glad to be here with my brother priests***;*** it’s good to be with Deacon Max, and in a special way with our dear Sisters who have become such an important part of all our lives here in the Diocese. And most of all, I’m so very happy to be here with you, my sisters and brothers in Christ, as we give thanks to God for all our blessings: for our families and all those we love and work so hard to provide for; for the beauty and abundance of the world around us, which so many of you work so hard to bring to harvest to help feed so many people; and most especially, as we give thanks to God for the gift of our Faith.

God’s Holy Word, which we just heard proclaimed for this 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, is in many ways challenging to hear. In a particular way, the words of Jesus in the Gospel may even be confusing to us. We think of Jesus as the Prince of Peace---as our loving, Good Shepherd----as the Savior of the world……And He is!

But today, we heard Jesus saying: “*Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.”* And then Jesus goes on to describe how following Him may lead to conflicts even among those closest to us in our lives: “*father divided against his son; a mother against her daughter.”* We might very well ask ourselves: What does this mean?

Let’s think back for a moment to those very first words of Jesus in today’s Gospel passage. He said: “*I have come to set the earth on fire.”*

Jesus IS the Word of God made Flesh. Jesus IS Emmanuel----God among us! Jesus IS both God and Human! When God the Father sent His only-begotten Son into the world as the greatest “sign” of God’s unconditional Love for us, that dramatically changed the world forever. Nothing before that, or since then, has been so dramatic. Jesus came to enter into the ultimate battle against sin, evil and death for us----on our behalf. And the reason why we’re here today----the reason why we are Catholics and followers of Jesus---the reason why we can come together to celebrate the Eucharist no matter what else is going on in our lives----is because Jesus WON that battle---He WON the Victory----He has given us the great gift of Salvation. That’s what Jesus meant when He said: “*I have come to set the earth on fire.”*

In other words, we have to choose: are we going to be on Jesus’ side---on the side of being His follower and living our lives according to Jesus’ teachings? Or not?

If a person close to me chooses not to follow Jesus, and I make the choice to follow Jesus, that probably will lead to some differences of opinion between the two of us, right?

That’s what Jesus meant when He talked about “divisions” even among those closest to us in our lives. But, it is critically important that each of us must make a choice: are we with Jesus, or not? Are we going to be “set on fire” with our Love for Jesus, or will we choose to be “cold” and “complacent” about God and living according to God’s ways in our lives?

Pope Francis recently said this when he was speaking to youth from all over the world at World Youth Day in Poland, and what he said to them applies to all of us as well: “Jesus invites you to make your mark on life; He invites you to leave a mark on History!” If each of us gathered together here today would allow ourselves to be “set on fire” with a vibrant faith and a Love for Jesus filling our lives, that would do more than anything else in being a powerful example on our families, and would make our mark on this part of the world in which we live.

Today’s Fiesta theme is “The Day of the Family”. There’s no one closer to us, or more important to us, than our family members: our spouses, our children, our parents and grandparents, our siblings. Our homes should be the places where we feel the safest, most secure, and unconditionally loved. Our families also need to be the people from whom we first learn about Jesus, and living with our Families should help us to follow Jesus faithfully and joyfully in our lives.

Jesus doesn’t want division. But, each of us has to make that most important choice: are we with Jesus, or not?

Tomorrow is the joyful and solemn Feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Mother. Our Catholic Faith teaches us that at the end of our Blessed Mothers’ life in this world, she was “assumed”, body and soul, into that special place of Honor which she has been given in Heaven for all eternity.

From her Heavenly vantage point, our Blessed Mother’s whole focus is on helping each and every one of us to stay close to her Son, Jesus. Our Blessed Mother is constantly interceding for us----pleading our cause to her Son Jesus. Please make sure that you stay close to our Blessed Mother. Pray to her. Pray the Rosary. Take all of your problems, worries, failures and concerns to her. She will not only give you the comfort that any Mother wants to give her precious Child, but she will help us---guide us---lead us to Jesus Who wants to free us from anything that “divides” us. Jesus wants to reconcile us to Him and to one another. In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we know that Jesus wants only to forgive us of our sins and keep us united to Him.

Today’s annual Diocesan Fiesta is a happy event, and our celebration of Mass here is an essential part of this celebration. But whether it’s here at the Fiesta, or at our local parishes, coming to Mass every week is very, very important for all of us. When we come to Mass we can hear God speak to our hearts. When we come to Mass Jesus is able to give Himself to us as our Food and Drink to help us to be strong and spiritually healthy. When we come to Mass, we can be “set on fire” with Jesus’ Love so that we are better prepared to always make the right choice to be with Jesus.

May our coming to Mass each week, our regular devotion to our Blessed Mother, and the love, support and strength that we find in our Families put an end to all divisions among us, and keep us united with our Loving God here in this world, and in the life of the world to come.

God bless you, now and always!