



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

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"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already blazing!" Luke 12:49

In this Gospel reading Jesus speaks of bringing "fire to the earth," followed by a stark and shocking statement about bringing division to the household, "From now on a household ... will be divided." How does this passionate statement reconcile with the Gospel message of peace? It is good to recall that in every Gospel, whenever Jesus meets people he says "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." In the Gospel of John he goes on to say, "I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." John 14:27

Fire is a symbol of purification. Just as fire purifies precious metals by separating out the dross, Jesus separates the just from the unjust. Fire is closely connected with the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Holy Spirit is symbolized as tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-4). This Gospel message signifies fire as a purification of the just as well as empowerment to carry the authority of Christ in their mission.

The second saying about "baptism" does not refer primarily to the sacrament. The Greek word means to be immersed or plunged. Here Jesus speaks of being immersed in his passion and death. These two sayings recall the words of John the Baptist in Luke 3:16: "He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire."

The second section concerns the division that Jesus' mission can create in families. As Simeon foretold, "This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed ... " (2:34). What was true for Jesus himself would be true for his followers.

This passage may be particularly important for those who think that the Christian life should be all domestic accord, one that looks for a church where everybody always gets along. But in the human condition it is inevitable that there will be disagreement and division. Jesus reminds us today that following him is not always an easy road.

Given today's polarized environment, it is important to reflect on his message of fire. Anytime a spiritual refiner's fire is kindled, the purifying flames will divide those who accept the call to grow spiritually verses those who are attached to the disordered passions of the world through the lure of the evil one, who prowls about the world seeking division. Jesus well understands how this division can painfully strike the heart and soul of family and friends.

One final note: His message is also a message of urgency, "how I wish it were already blazing!" He is yearning to get on with His mission, and his Mission is for us. We, too, should reflect today on the urgency of the task before us. As the fire of the Holy Spirit within us flares God makes all things new in that moment. If we live in Him, his illuminating newness of mission will warm us by the fire Christ casts upon the earth.

"Stay awake and be ready! For you do not know when the Lord will come."

Matt 24:42

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to his disciples:

*"I came to bring fire to the earth,
and how I wish it were already blazing!
I have a baptism with which to be baptized,
and what anguish 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 a household of five 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