

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in OT\_C

August 17, 2025

St. Edward's Parish

"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" These words perhaps strike us quite vividly this summer. With the relentless wildfires these past few weeks, we have a very real awareness of the intensity and power of fire. So, what does our Lord mean by coming to bring fire to the earth? Does He mean to bring wildfires and destruction? We are reading from the Gospel of Luke today, and if we look elsewhere in Luke's writing, we can see how fire is used to represent the action of God. Earlier in the Gospel of Luke, St. John the Baptist says of the coming of Jesus: "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Lk 3:9)" Here, fire represents the judgment of God on evil the purification from sin. John again says of Jesus "the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. (Lk 3:17)" This means all that is worthless, He comes to destroy.

A second aspect of fire comes from the well-known account in the Acts of the Apostles when the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles as fire. Here, fire represents the powerful presence of God filling the Apostles and changing their lives. So, we have these two biblical aspects of fire: the purification from sin and the presence of God within us. The coming of the Holy Spirit holds these two together. The Holy Spirit purifies and destroys sin, and He brings the presence of God into our souls. It seems this is the fire that Jesus wants to cast upon the earth.

St. John of the Cross uses the image of fire acting upon a log of wood to express these two works of the Holy Spirit within our souls. When a fresh log is placed in a fire, the first action of the fire is to purify the log, driving away the moisture and sap. So the Holy Spirit does this in our soul: first He seeks to purify us from sin, driving away all that is impure and contrary to God. After that purification is completed, the fire begins to transform the wood into itself. The fire penetrates the wood, and the wood takes on the properties of the fire even seeming to become fire itself. So, the Holy Spirit wishes to make our souls into the very likeness of God Himself. To fill us with the burning fire of His love.

This is the fire that Our Lord longs to bring upon the Earth, and He says wishes the whole earth was kindled. Therefore, this is not just reserved for a special class of people, but He invites all of us to ascend to the very highest stages of holiness if we are willing.

The next verse in the Gospel reveals how intensely Our Lord longs for this transformation in our souls. He says, “I have a baptism with which to be baptized and what stress I am under until it is completed!” Here, Our Lord is speaking of his suffering and death (see Mk 10:38), which will open the way for our purification from sin and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The word “baptism” literally means to immerse. So, Our Lord longs to be immersed into His suffering for us. His love was so intense that He was under stress, yearning to die for us, so that we could be purified from sin and transformed into total love of God by the Holy Spirit.

This intense love of Jesus for us and send the Holy Spirit explains the last strange verses of the Gospel, namely, that He did not come to bring peace but division. When this kind of intense love is revealed, there is no room to be indifferent. If we accept that Jesus loves us like this then we are invited to love Him in return with all our heart. He becomes the center of our life around which everything else takes its proper place. Nothing else can take priority over Jesus, not our job, our possessions, even our relationships. However, not everyone will understand or agree with this, and it will cause division. Many of you likely experience division in your own family because of your commitment to your Catholic faith. The early Christians felt this intensely. They lived in a time when they suffered intensely for their faith, even betrayed to death, because they would not bend in their commitment to Jesus. Let us pray today that the fire of the Holy Spirit may come upon us to purify us from all that is not of God and transform our souls into living flames of love for God who has loved us so much.