

AUGUST 18, 2019  
Sunday of the 20<sup>th</sup> Week in OT  
Lk. 12: 49-53

### FIRE AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

I know that you remember the wildfire happened last May 1, 2016 which began southwest of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada. It swept through the community, forcing the largest wildfire evacuation in Alberta's history, with upwards of 88,000 people forced from their homes. Firefighters were assisted by personnel from the Canadian Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, other Canadian provincial agencies, to fight the wildfire. Aid for evacuees was provided by various governments and via donations through the Canadian Red Cross and other local and national charitable organizations. In addition to the city, the fire has burned forest over 500,000 hectares of land across northern Alberta, 2,600 homes and structures. The wildfire caused a huge damage to properties, lives and environment. Fire caused destruction.

In the Bible or Holy Scriptures, the image of fire was often associated with God, His action in the world and in the lives of his people. God manifested his presence by the image of fire. In God's revelation to Moses, He was in the burning bush in the wilderness which was not consumed by the flames (Exodus 3:2), God continual presence, guidance and protection through the wilderness for forty years with the pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day (Exodus 13:21-22). During the time of prophet Elijah, he called down fire from heaven to reveal God's presence and power and to purify the people of false idols (1 Kings 18:36-39). Fire was not only a manifestation of destruction, anger, wrath of God but the image of fire was used as a sign of God's glory (Ezekiel 1:4, 13) and holiness (Deuteronomy 4:24), his protective presence (2 Kings 6:17), and his righteous judgment (Zechariah 13:9) and holy wrath against sin (Isaiah 66:15-16).

In the New testament fire is a sign and symbol of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. During the time of St. John the Baptist, he said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11-12 and Luke 3:16-17) and on Pentecost, "tongues of fire" appeared above their heads as a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:3).

The Old and New Testament Scriptures reveal that God's fire purifies and cleanses which means sins washed away, and it inspires us a reverent fear and respect for God and for his holy word.

In our gospel for today, Jesus Christ starts off wonderfully, as the Lord says, "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!" He wants the world on fire of His love, of His word and of His life. But what He wants us to do? There is a price of following Him and will happen through and within our own selves and our own families. He said: "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; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father,,,,," and so forth. Our Lord was telling his disciples, and now to us, that there will be a cost of discipleship – it is not an easy path but at the end the reward will be nothing compare to what we experienced.

This is not what I and most people want to hear. A lot of people don't want to hear that choosing Christ, following Him and giving all to Him will put our lives in disagreement with those around us, there will be persecution, and will be ridiculed by others. We want everything, even our religion, to be easy. We don't want to have to pay a price for living and dedicating our whole life for our faith.

But, my brothers and sister, we have to.

Because we have chosen Christ, we are teased and reduced by other to being Jesus insane followers. This is part of the cost of discipleship. Because we have chosen Christ, we are confronted with difficult decisions that we need to embrace. For you, as husbands and wives, and we clergy and religious, we embrace the cost of discipleship by being committed to our vows in difficult times as well as in easy times. The cost of discipleship of married people, that we know there are no perfect marriage between imperfect people, demands that you accept each other's limitations and love your wife or your husband even during those days that you don't particularly like him or her, annoyed with him/her habits, even his/her likes and dislikes, and when your husband or wife forget your anniversaries or birthday. But still, you love him/her because you love him/her and nothing else. Whatever his/her deficiency, you still understand because of the love you shared to each other. The cost of discipleship demands that even in hardship and difficulties, problems and worries, we trust the Lord until the end.

My brothers and sisters, the spirit of Christianity is our loyalty to Jesus Christ - the Son of God and Savior of the world - a loyalty that takes precedence over our own selves. Our discipleship will always to follow Him and be with Him, that is, on the cross and death but in the end, the reward of heaven, with God and with all His angels and saints. So, keep the fire in your heart and "burned the world" with God's love by our good works, good words and good life.

Let this be our prayer: "Lord Jesus, may the fire of your love consume me and transform my life that I may truly desire nothing more than life with you and inspire other people by my good deeds and words. Fill me with the power of your Holy Spirit that I may always seek to please you and do your will today and for ever. Amen."