

Homily for October 25, 2018

Fire is used repeatedly in the Bible to describe our relationship with God. Firstly it is used as a depiction of God's judgment, as in one of Jesus' parables where he says: "The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."¹ Secondly it represents divine purification as when used by St. Peter in this verse from his first epistle: "so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."² Thirdly, it is used to represent God's loving presence, as we read in Exodus chapter 3 with Moses and the burning bush. The bush is aflame and radiates warmth and light, but the bush isn't consumed.

Fire is therefore understood as a means of expressing God's judging, purifying, and loving presence. We need to keep all three of these purposes of fire in mind when we think of Jesus' words from today's Gospel:

***I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!**³*

When we realize that the love of Jesus results in the claim he makes on us to live with him at the centre, we do experience his judgment in relation to all within our lives that is contrary to his will for us. This is in turn, so we can be purified in our thoughts, words, and deeds to enter more fully into his loving presence. Those who love Jesus are open to this threefold work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The judging fire can be called the purgative way. Here the Holy Spirit wants to purge us of the sin that separates us from Jesus. The purifying fire can be called the illuminative way, where we see more clearly the way of the Lord and conform our lives to his, so that we can discover the fire of love known as the unitive way.

I want to refer to our reading from Ephesians where St. Paul describes the illuminative way with richly textured language:

¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

To be rooted and grounded in love allows for faith to ever expand in our hearts so that Jesus can illumine our path. People who are cultivating this type of faith have a deepening desire to read the Word of God, to come to a fuller understanding of their Catholic faith and are ever more attentive to examining their motives and action through a life of deepening prayer.

¹ [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Mt 22:7). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

² [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, 1 Pe 1:7). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Lk 12:49). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

This is so they can more fully enter the unitive experience of the love of Jesus, described by Paul this way:

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

To be filled with the fulness of God will not be attained completely until heaven. But what a grace to come into experiences of unity with Jesus where we experience the warmth of his presence as we radiate with his love.

But such a fire is not readily accepted or desired by all. That is why when we have entered the threefold way of purgation, illumination and unity there are those in our families who may oppose us, desiring to throw buckets of water on this fire described by Jesus as the kind of opposition that kind arise in families.

When we are in Christ, with Paul, who was in jail when writing these words, we know Jesus love surpasses all other loves and we will not allow any to extinguish His fire.