

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time Aug 18, 2019

Today's gospel reading is striking. Whenever we read the gospel it's important to imagine the vocal undertone of Christ's words. Like any other person, sometimes His voice would have been gentle and calm, and sometimes it would have been tense. And in today's gospel Jesus proclaims: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing." There is a vibrant urgency to these words that must have been apparent in his voice.

What does He mean? Why is He so passionate about this?

In the ancient Jewish world, fire was generally associated with judgment. We usually associate judgment with punishment. Yet Christ himself said in the gospel of John that He did not come to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. So, what kind of judgment does Jesus bring?

He brings the judgment of the Cross. He brings the judgment that God so loved the world that He gave his only Son for us. FOR US. He brings the judgment that brought St Paul to exclaim that "He loved me and He gave himself for ME."

So, when we really look at the crucifix, we see the judgment of God. We see the horror of sin, and the infinitely greater love of God who came to die to set us free from sin and unite us to Himself.

Jesus reaffirms this in today's gospel when He says that there is a baptism with which He must be baptized, and that He is in anguish until it is accomplished. Here Jesus is referring to his suffering, death, and resurrection. Christ came, then, to set the earth on fire by His death and resurrection. That brought us into a new relationship with Him, setting us free to truly love Him and, in Him, to truly love others.

And He invites us to share in that fire, to say with Him: "I also have a mission to set the world on fire with freedom and love for God."

Sometimes setting the world on fire occurs in simple ways. There's a story about a man walking on a beach in a tropical country. Thousands of starfish have washed up on the shore and lay shriveling in the blazing sun. Without immediate immersion they would die. As the man walked along he saw a young boy picking up starfish one by one, and throwing them back into the ocean. He was struck by the apparent futility of the boy's actions in comparison with the vast number of star fish, and so he decided to teach him a lesson. Walking up to him, he sneered "Can't you see that there are thousands of starfish dying here in the beach, and all you're doing is throwing a few back into the water? What difference does it make?" The boy didn't look at him. Instead he picked up another starfish and tossed it into the cool waters beyond the sand. Then he looked at the man and said, "I'll bet it made a difference to that one."

Christ calls us to change the world, to set it on fire with His love. And each person can share in that, no matter how small the action seems to be. Everyday! The witness of others always has a decisive impact. Pope St. Paul 6th said the best teachers are the witnesses. And our witness to others is a vital part of Christianity. We are called upon to **take-the-time-to-witness**.

Imagine that you had won the following prize in a contest: Each morning your Magical bank would deposit \$86,400 in your private account for your use. However, this prize has rules, just as any game has certain rules.

The first set of rules would be: Everything that you didn't spend during each day would be taken away from you. You may not simply transfer money into some other account. You may only spend it. Each morning upon awakening, the bank opens your account with another \$86,400 for that day.

The second set of rules: The bank can end the game without warning; at any time. It can say, "It's over, the game is over!" It can close the account and you will **not** receive a new one.

What would you personally do? You would buy anything and everything you wanted, right? Not only for yourself, but also for all people you love, right? (Maybe Living & Giving). You might even buy stuff for people you don't know, because you couldn't possibly spend it all on yourself, right? You would try to spend every cent, and use it all, right?

ACTUALLY, this GAME is REALITY! Each of us is in possession of such a magical bank. We just can't seem to see it. The MAGICAL BANK is TIME!

Each morning we awaken to receive 86,400 seconds as a gift of life, and when we go to sleep at night, any remaining time is NOT credited to us. What we haven't lived up that day is forever lost. Yesterday is forever gone. Each morning the account is refilled, but the bank can dissolve your account at any time.... without warning. So, what will YOU do with your 86,400 seconds?

Each of us needs to ask: to what am I giving my precious time? What are my priorities? Do television, sports, making money, shopping, getting ahead on the job, volunteering in the church or the community swallow up time that could be better spent with those I love? How am I setting the world on fire?

What could be given up and replaced with family time, parent time, couple time: Making shared meals a priority (even if you gather at a fast food restaurant); praying and worshipping together, especially at the Sunday Eucharist and in family prayers, such as the rosary; building family traditions and rituals; taking part in retreats and family education programs. Watching virtue-based programs on television together and discussing values being promoted on programs can be time well spent as a family.

We are all called to martyrdom. The term "martyr" means "witness." And we are all called to witness. Most of us won't die a violent death for our faith, but each one of us is called to set the world on fire for Christ through a little death to our own selfishness towards others.

There's an everyday martyrdom to which we're all called. It means smiling at someone when we feel lousy. It means a kind word when we feel like biting someone else's head off. It means refusing to give in to bitterness or hatred towards someone who's hurt us, and instead choosing to forgive that person.

Those little acts of witness to Christ's love – of martyrdom – help to set the world on fire with love.

As we come to receive the true body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask Him to set our hearts on fire with His love for us and for all people, and to give us the strength to witness that love in everything we do.