

Set the World on Fire with the Love of God

Homily August 18, 2019 Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Fr. Anthony Ram—Let our hearts be on fire; blazing with the love of God!

Readings

First reading: Jerimiah 38: 4-6, 8-10

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40: 2 ,3, 4, 18

Second Reading: Hebrews 12: 1-4

Gospel: Luke 12: 49-53

What do you think of the Gospel today? Is it not strange that these are the words coming from Jesus' mouth? "Do you think that I have come to establish peace?" No – division. He said, "I have come to establish division." And in the beginning of the Gospel he says, "I came to set fire on earth and how I wish it were already blazing!

We always see Jesus as a calm, quiet peace-loving person. In fact, when He was born the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest and peace to people who live on Earth." And Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers." And the first thing Jesus told the apostles after the resurrection was, "Peace be with you." But today in the gospel reading he is talking about division and fire.

What does Jesus actually mean when he is talking in today's passage? For us to better understand, we have to put it in context—where was He talking, to whom he was talking and what was the context in which Jesus spoke?

Today's Gospel reading was taken from Luke Chapter 12. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem with His disciples. In the Gospel from the last five weeks Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. He's talking with His disciples and trying to teach them on different topics—teaching them what it really means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Just to give you an example, last week was about a vigilant and faithful servant, how the servant has to be. So, Jesus was teaching His apostles. And the previous week, Jesus was teaching them about the rich fool who was blessed with plenty of harvest but never thought about God. And the week before that was the apostles asking Jesus, "Lord teach us to pray." And the week before that was about the Good Samaritan. So, Jesus is talking to His disciples and today He is talking about fire and division. God came indeed to set fire on earth—there is no doubt about it! But it is not the fire of destruction, but the fire of love and God's presence.

I'll give three examples: One from the Old Testament. When God appeared to Moses, Moses saw a burning bush. And God spoke from the burning bush. Moses was surprised because when he saw the bush was burning, but it was not turned to ashes. There were just flames. He goes and talks to God. So, fire is always, in the bible, the presence of God; cleansing fire and life-giving fire.

And to give an example from the New Testament, when the apostles were all hiding because of their fear of the Jews, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon them as tongues of fire. They received courage, they received strength, they received the Holy Spirit in the form of fire.

In the book of Hebrews, the author says, "Our God is a consuming fire." And in Luke's Gospel after the resurrection, when two people are going to Emmaus, Jesus walks with them. And at the end, He breaks the bread they saw it was Jesus and then he disappeared. And these twelve disciples are going back to Jerusalem and this is what they said, "Were not our hearts burning with fire as he was talking to us?" That is the fire that Jesus wanted to set on the earth. And he wishes it were already blazing now!

And this is the fire we all have already received. I am sure we will not all remember the day of our Baptism, especially if you were Baptized as an infant. But I'm sure we have all seen a Baptism. In the Baptism the priest takes the candle, lights it from the Paschal candle, and gives it to the parents and Godparents. And this is what he says, "Receive the light of Christ. See that it is blazing always in your life."

This child has to walk always in the light of Christ. This flame of faith that you received in Baptism should be kept burning until the last day. This, dear brothers and sisters, is the fire that Jesus is talking about--not the fire of destruction, but the fire of love and the fire of life! We all have received this fire and this is what Jesus is saying to the apostles, "I want that you be on fire of God's love and God's life. Be vibrant--not dormant--be vibrant! You recently have received the fire of God and it has to be burning brightly giving life to yourself and to others. This fire has to be lit in everyone's life."

The other thing Jesus is talking about in this scripture is division. This is the consequence of believing in Christ. There is always division between darkness and light, truth and falsehood, good and bad. And Jesus says, "If you believe in me, if you are on fire for me, be sure that you will be opposed." You will be discouraged, you will face challenges, you will find division because people not all people believe in truth. When you speak the truth,

there will be people who oppose you. That's what we heard today in the first reading. Jerimiah warned the king about the upcoming event. But the king and the people did not like it because they were hoping for some wonderful victory. Jerimiah says, "No, don't go to war!" The consequence is that he is thrown in a well.

There are so many examples, but just to give one more—Francis of Assisi was born to a very wealthy family. He had all the luxuries that he wanted. But when God called him, he left everything. This was a big shock for him and everyone in his family. His father tried his best to dissuade him telling him to leave God, just enjoy your life, you have all the comforts you need here. But Francis went forward in prayer and fasting living a simple life. At the age of twenty-five his father brought Francis literally locked him in a room because he believed in Jesus and wanted to follow Jesus in simplicity of heart. That would not stop Francis of Assisi because whenever his father was out, his mother would open the door and let him go. And one day his father said, "If you believe in God and want to live your life like this, then have nothing to do with me. I am not going to give you any of the inheritance." And this is what Francis of Assisi did; He took off the clothes he had on. "...even these I don't want. I leave everything for my Savior. There was division in the family because he believed in Christ."

It's not that this always happens, but it does happen even now. I had a friend--and this happened just a few years back—when he joined the seminary his father said, "No!" because he had two sisters and he was the only boy. Being a boy his father said, "I want the family lineage to continue and I want you to get married and I don't want you to go to the priesthood. But my friend says no, he wants to be a priest. And his father hoped that some day while he is in the seminary he will realize and

come back. All his seminary life his father never spoke to him. On the day of ordination, we all had our parents and relatives present. His father did not come—his mother had already died and his father did not come for his own ordination. And he wanted to celebrate the first Mass, which is always in our own place where we were born; just like we had Fr. Alex celebrate his first Mass in Enid because he was from Enid. And this seminarian, this new priest, was not allowed to say Mass in his own village because of his own family. Instead he had to celebrate in the cathedral. And this is the division that Jesus is talking about. If you stand up for Christ, you will be opposed, you will have problems, you will face difficulties, even from your own people whom you love!

So, Jesus is telling His disciples—be prepared, be ready, be on fire with the love of God and at the same time, be ready for the consequences.

Dear brothers and sisters today this is the message that Jesus is giving to all of us. *We are all disciples of Jesus*. We need to be on fire for God. This fire has to be lit in every person—it has to be blazing and spreading to each person. At the same time, we will have to face difficulties and challenges. And these will not discourage us because Jesus will give us the strength that we need. In this Holy Mass let us ask Jesus to give us blessings and His grace so that we might be on fire and be true disciples of Jesus.