

*“I have come to bring fire on the earth,
and how I wish it were already kindled!”*

Homily, 14th August, 2016

Luke 12,49-53

father G. Paparone o.p.

The Gospel of the 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time cuts off from Jesus' typical exhortation to search for his *kingdom* and live according to his *word*.

It cuts off slightly more, because today's Gospel tells us how **the psychological effect the word should affect** our world, our reality, our society and, we can add, our inner self as well.

Jesus came to bring a shattering word, comparable to fire which lights up, burns and destroys.

This metaphor was also used by John the Baptist when he said:

“But after me comes one who will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into his barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (cfr. Mt 3,12 – Luke 3,17).

In this case, however, burning is conceived positively by Jesus which is proven by the words: *and how I wish it were already kindled!*”

Hence, this kind of fire is evidently not a material fire which destroys what is being burnt.

It's a spiritual fire!

This fire is meant to destroy evil, errors, ignorance, malignity, whatever keeps us separate from God.

This is why Jesus desires that this fire were already lit: *“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!”*

This fire that Jesus wished were already lit is the **fire of Pentecost, which will light up the heart of mankind after his death.** Indeed, the following verse clearly states: *“But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished.”*

The baptism Jesus is talking about in this verse is his death, the **spiritual Baptism.**

He underwent a physical Baptism, a human one, through John the Baptist in the river Jordan at the beginning of his preaching and now he must receive a spiritual baptism, which consists in this burning fire of consummation.

A burning fire of consummation, yes, in order to generate a new life, a different life.

Accordingly, Jesus will be transformed, so to speak, into fire: indeed he rises as pure spirit, as pure fire.

We have a magnificent testament, the *Holy Shrine* portraying this fire, an emission of burning rays traversing the cloth in which the Lord had been swathed.

Thus, the fire that Jesus wants to light is the fire that transforms our human nature in order to deify it, make it able to live in a purely divine sphere.

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The Baptism that Jesus has to receive, is his death and resurrection, while **the Baptism that Christians must receive, that humanity must receive, is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit through which our lives are inflamed.**

Clearly, there are many ways to accomplish this project: but **if the Word of the Lord has not warmed, ignited, inflamed, transformed our lives, this means it has not yet reached us.**

In the Scriptures we read that God is a devouring fire, a fire of consummation, consuming all that is mortal, ephemeral, temporary; sin, mostly, but that's not all: it is also the fragility of human flesh, the destiny of which is resurrection.

This spiritual fire which is to inflame our souls causes two effects:

- a **subjective** effect because it purifies, transforms, changes, spiritualizes, deifies our human nature, liberating us from sin, evil and death;
- an **external** effect, because it clashes with everything that doesn't want to be burned, ignited and refuses this transition. This is certainly a painful transition, for resurrection is the result of **death.**

And nobody wants to die!

Nobody wants to die nor give up smoking, or other vices such as gluttony or lust or envy. Imagine yourselves, therefore, having to lose the basics of humanity's approach to thought and action!...

Who dares go closer to God?
Who is courageous enough?

God is a devouring fire!!

I visited a Church, founded by Saint Colombano, in a small village on the Apennines, where, on the fronton of the door were engraved the following words: "God is a devouring fire, a fire of exhaustion".

To go closer to God means, should mean, to let his love ignite our soul, to let Him transform it.

We have no other choice:

- **either we live a life which is always identical to itself**, where the upmost desire is to be a little more morally "ok", with a serene conscience, devoid of remorse, regret, but **still living that same old worldly, limited, self-centred, material life;**

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- **or, we gain the courage to reach out to this deified life which is proposed to us, by receiving his fire.** A fire which consumes us but is able to transform, regenerate, ultimately donating a deified life.

So let us pray to God that He gives us the courage to consent to his burning, **so that we may live the Communion within his divine flame, thus with the Holy Spirit.**

Praised be the Lord Jesus Christ.