

# 20th Sunday C Ordinary Time - St. Peter Parish

## I. Introduction

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us he came into the world to light a fire. So let me talk a little about fire – fires that aren't so good and the fire that was lit by Jesus and is fanned by the Holy Spirit ... with our participation, of course, because we are chosen to love.

## II. Bad Fire

Not every fire is good. Let me illustrate. When I was a kid, about seven years old, our family car stalled at a very busy intersection. To show you how old I am, the car was a new 1958 Ford. Dad tried to start it but it just wouldn't go; the engine was "flooded", as we used to say. So he popped the hood – and you have to understand that hoods on '58 Fords opened backwards – so from inside the car we could see that the engine was on fire! Sitting in the back seat, just a kid, seven years old, I thought this was pretty interesting! But Mom and Dad knew that a burning car full of gas in a busy intersection was not a very good situation. So Mom hustled me out of the car and Dad ran to a nearby gas station, got a fire extinguisher, and put the fire out before the firefighters arrived. A few days later, Mom and Dad bought a Chevy!

Well, there's all kinds of fires Jesus didn't light. The fires of anger, smoldering resentment, the heat of passion, the searing effects of drugs both on the brain and on the soul, the fever of self-centeredness ... Jesus didn't light those fires and the Holy Spirit doesn't fan them – nor should we! Like my parents who instantly knew the dangers of a burning car, Jesus and the Holy Spirit know that the fires of sin are destructive; so the Good Shepherd tries to rescue us from danger while the Holy Spirit tries to put out those destructive fires.

But I use the word "try" – Jesus "tries" to rescue us, the Holy Spirit "tries" to douse destructive fires ... because even God's attempts to rescue us will not be successful without our consent and without our cooperation. The Gospel makes it clear: we have to decide either to be for Christ or against him! God gives us the help we need

to cooperate – for we have been chosen to love – but we have to give consent by repenting and seeking forgiveness. For you and me this means regularly receiving the Sacrament of Penance, the Sacrament of Mercy whereby our sins are truly forgiven by the priest acting in the very person of Jesus Christ.

### **III. Good Fire**

Now let's talk about the fire Jesus did light, the fire the Holy Spirit fans with our active participation. Jesus refers to it in the Gospel from St. Luke that was just read. "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:49) What fire did Jesus light and what fire does the Holy Spirit fan? What fire does Jesus still want to see burning in every heart, in your heart and mine, and in every community throughout the world?

Jesus came to set the world on fire with the love that burns eternally in the heart of the Trinity! He came to set our hearts ablaze with the love he shares with his Father in the power of the Holy Spirit from before the foundation of the world. This fire is very different from the destructive fires of anger, resentment, passion, and abuse. Those things can trap us and then consume us! Instead, the fire Jesus came to light is the fire of God's love, a love that utterly free, utterly generous, and completely passionate. This is the true freedom and true love you're looking for! It affirms our dignity and worth, it brings us joy, freedom, and life! By sending his Son to become one of us, to share our life, our joys, and sorrows, to preach the good news and lay down his life for us to save us from sin— The Father shows us to what lengths He will go to share his love with us! How great his love for humanity, his for his Church, his love for each one of us! St. Paul tells us what kind of fire ought to be in our hearts when he says: "... I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me!" (Gal. 2:20)

### **IV. Come, Holy Spirit!**

When you doubt yourself or face serious problems; when you face ridicule for loving and practicing your faith; when you are anxious about the future and wonder what God expects of you; then do be afraid to say, "Come Holy Spirit, fill my heart! And

enkindle in my heart the fire of God's love! With the help of the Holy Spirit, fan the fire of God's love."

It will blaze in your heart only if you pray each day, and only if you participate at least each Sunday in the Eucharist where we truly meet Jesus who sacrifice of love becomes present and real for us. Jesus gave us the Eucharist because He desires more than anything else that we share the warmth and joy of his love, a love that changes us into the persons God means us to be, so that our hearts are ablaze not with the destructive fires of sin but rather with the glory of God!

With the help of the Holy Spirit, the fire of God's love will not only blaze in your hearts but you will help light that fire throughout the world. For you are chosen to love ... and you are chosen for a vocation of love. St. Catherine of Sienna once said: "If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world ablaze!" It's the power of good example, not caving in to the pressure to go along to get along, that enables you right now to proclaim the Gospel to those around you. Every one of you has been given a vocation, a calling to love ... because marriage, religious life, and priesthood, as well as the diaconate ... these are ways God may be calling you to light the fire of his love not only in your own heart but in the hearts of others. Every vocation, priesthood, consecrated life, marriage and family, is a calling to fan into the flame the fire of God's love. Every day we should ask ourselves: "How is Jesus Christ inviting me to help him set the world on fire with his love?" "How is Jesus Christ asking me to be an instrument of his love in a world that needs His love so desperately?"

You are chosen to love. You are chosen to help Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, set the world ablaze with the fire of God's love!

"Come Holy Spirit!

Fill the hearts of your faithful

Enkindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your spirit and they shall be created

And you will renew the face of the earth!"

God bless you and keep you in his love!