

“I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!”

The literal meaning from the original biblical Greek is “I have come to throw fire on the earth.” This is a deliberate, purposeful, active meaning. Jesus draws upon one of the richest and most powerful images in all of Scripture. Fire has multiple meanings in the Word of God. At times, it symbolizes judgment—think of the flames of Gehenna that burn against sin and rebellion. Fire represents the justice of God, consuming evil and revealing what cannot stand before him.

Fire is also an image of purification. Just as gold and silver are refined in fire so that impurities are burned away, so too does the Lord purify our hearts through trials, sufferings, and discipline. As the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, we must “rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us” so that we may run the race with freedom.

In addition, fire is a symbol of faith itself. Jeremiah spoke of God’s Word as a fire in his bones. St. Paul urged Timothy to “stir into flame the gift of God” received through the laying on of hands. And on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles as tongues of fire, igniting in them courage, conviction, and zeal.

So when Jesus says he came to cast fire on the earth, he is announcing the fullness of his mission: to destroy evil, to purify hearts, to inflame souls with the Spirit, and to awaken faith that is alive and burning. It is no wonder he exclaims with longing: “How I wish it were already blazing!”

This divine fire is not just an image or a passing feeling. It is a living reality communicated to us through the sacramental life of the Church. Every sacrament is an encounter with the living God, where the Holy Spirit sets our hearts aflame with grace. In Baptism, we are plunged into Christ’s death and resurrection, and the fire of divine life is kindled within us. In Confirmation, the Holy Spirit strengthens us with tongues of fire so that we can witness boldly to the faith. In

the Eucharist, the Risen Christ draws near as he did on the road to Emmaus, and our hearts, too, are set ablaze as we recognize him in the Breaking of the Bread. In Confession, the fire of mercy consumes the sins that cling to us, restoring us to friendship with God.

This fire is not destructive but transformative. It is the peace of Christ that the world cannot give—a peace not of compromise, but of communion with God. The peace of Jesus is born of the cross, the “baptism” that he longed to complete, reconciling humanity to the Father through his own suffering and death. Every time we receive the sacraments, we are immersed again in that mystery, purified and strengthened to live as his disciples.

But Jesus warns us that this fire also brings division. Even within families, there may be tension between those who surrender to Christ and those who resist him. Why? Because the fire of the Spirit exposes divided hearts. We want to follow Jesus, and yet we cling to habits, sins, and attachments that hold us back. We want peace, but too often it is the false peace of compromising our faith to please others, not the true peace of communion with God.

This is why today’s Gospel challenges us to reject complacency and lukewarm faith. Christ did not die and rise again so that we might live halfhearted lives, content with minimum effort, trying to keep everyone happy. He came to set us on fire, to burn away complacency, to free us from compromise, and to make us his witnesses.

This is not something we achieve by our own strength. It is not Pelagianism, where we attempt to perfect ourselves by sheer effort. No—this is the work of grace. The Holy Spirit himself is the fire that transforms us from within. Our part is to open ourselves, to invite the flame to spread, to allow God’s love to burn away everything that keeps us from him.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus longs for this fire to blaze in us. He longs for our hearts to be alive with love, alive with zeal, alive with the Spirit who brings peace, not the world's fragile peace, but his eternal peace. Pray today that the Holy Spirit will stir into flame the gift we have received, so that we may persevere in the race, our eyes fixed on Jesus, until the day when his fire fully consumes the world in love.