

GOSPEL

LUKE 12:49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over!

'Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; the father divided against the son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus warns the disciples that the time for decision has arrived. In fact, his coming into the world coincides with the time for decisive choices: the option for the Gospel cannot be delayed. And in order to make this call clearer, he alludes to the fire that he himself came to bring to earth. He says: "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled". These words aim to persuade the disciples to abandon their attitude of laziness, apathy, indifference and closure, so as to welcome the fire of God's love; that love which, as Saint Paul reminds us, "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5). Because it is the Holy Spirit that makes us love God and love our neighbour. It is the Holy Spirit whom we all have within us.

Jesus confides his most ardent desire to his friends and also to us: to spread the fire of God's love on earth that enlightens life and through which mankind is saved. Jesus calls us to spread throughout the world this fire, thanks to which, we will be recognized as his true disciples. The fire of love, lit by Christ in the world through the Holy Spirit, is a boundless fire. It is a universal fire. This was so ever since the early days of Christianity: bearing witness to the Gospel spread like a beneficial fire, overcoming all division among

individuals, social categories, peoples and nations. Bearing witness to the Gospel burns. It overcomes all forms of particularism and keeps charity wide open to all, with a preferential option for the poorest and the excluded.

Adherence to the fire of love that Jesus brought to earth, envelopes our entire existence and requires the adoration of God as well as a willingness to serve others. Adoration of God and a willingness to serve others. First, the readiness to adore God, also means learning the prayer of adoration which we usually forget. This is why I invite everyone to discover the beauty of the prayer of adoration and to recite it often. And second, the willingness to serve others. I think with admiration of the many youth communities and groups, who during the summer, dedicate themselves to this service to the sick, the poor and people with disabilities. In order to live according to the Gospel spirit, faced with the ever new needs that arise in the world, there is a need for disciples of Christ who know how to respond with new charitable initiatives. And so, with the adoration of God and service to others — practised together, adoring God and serving others — the Gospel truly manifests itself as a fire that saves, that changes the world beginning with a change in the heart of each one.

In this perspective, we can also understand Jesus' other statement mentioned in today's passage which, at first glance, may be disconcerting: "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division". He came to "separate with fire". To separate what? Good from evil, the just from the unjust. In this sense he came to "divide", to cause "uneasiness" — albeit in a healthy way — in his disciples' lives, breaking the facile illusions of those who think they can combine Christian life with worldliness, Christian life with compromises of all kinds, piety with a hostile attitude to others. Combining, some think, true religiosity with superstitious practices: how many so-called Christians go to fortune tellers to have their palms read! And this is superstition. It is not God. One must not live in a hypocritical

way but be willing to pay the price for choices that are consistent — this is the attitude that each of us should seek in life: [being] consistent — paying the price for being consistent with the Gospel. Being consistent with the Gospel. Because it is good to call ourselves Christian but above all it is necessary to be Christian in concrete situations, witnessing to the Gospel, which is essentially love for God and for our brothers and sisters.

May Mary Most Holy help us to allow our hearts to be purified by the fire brought by Jesus in order to spread it with our life through decisive and courageous choices.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Why might Jesus wish the earth was already ablaze — as explained by Pope Francis — with the 'fire' of the Holy Spirit?
- How are you called to enter into the same 'baptism' of Jesus, to bring new life to the Church and the world?
- What new insights do you get into this reading from the reflection of Pope Francis?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.