

## 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Luke 12:49-53

A string of Sundays in which Jesus' interactions and discourses are disconcerting,  
even – dare we say – *weird*.

Today's discourse is no exception.

Jesus talks about fire and anguish and division.

Sounds fun to me!

Moreover, try reconciling what Jesus says with what he says elsewhere, e.g.

- his many wishes of peace
- the intimate prayer in John 17, in which he expresses his great desire for unity  
“May they be one.” (verses 21,22)

Hmmm.

Jesus reveals that he has come to set the earth on fire.

Not a mild undertaking: the whole earth on fire...

We know from the scriptures as a whole that Jesus' purpose is to love.

In this passage, Jesus begins with a metaphor that is meant to help us understand

- his heart
- the nature of his love

Jesus comes to love like fire which burns *everything*, “the earth”.

Jesus comes to communicate the love which burns in his heart.

Jesus comes to deposit his heart into our heart ...which is then transformed.

That sounds beautiful and intense, but a grave question arises:

If Jesus comes to love, why does he speak of division?

Is not *union* the fruit, the consequence of love?

Is not division the fruit, the consequence of *hatred*?

Why then does Jesus speak of coming to establish division?

It makes no sense...

Moreover, Jesus speaks of establishing division in the very group

that we all, rather spontaneously, believe ought to be very united: the *family*.

How can this be?

It is all the more incomprehensible, when we realize that

- the work of the Redeemer always respects the work of the Creator
- the Creator created the family
- a real family is a united family

Go figure.

Well, the division is indeed related to the fire, the fire of his love.

What exactly then is this burning love?

It is important, here, to make a distinction, between

- human love and divine love
- love born naturally in our hearts and love that comes *directly* from God

**Human** love, with its many faces, is beautiful:

the love between parent and child, between lovers, between dear friends..

Much poetry and much music have been made because of such love.

Human love is a certain absolute.

Human love transcends time and place,

yet, as we know, is, nonetheless, heavily conditioned by time and place.

Hence the phenomenon “out of sight, out of mind ...and eventually out of heart.”

**Divine** love, love from God, poured into our hearts, is a *gift*.

Divine love is poured forth because goodness, and thus love, by nature radiates.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son.” (John 3:16)

Divine love is an absolute in a way that human love is not.

In other words, *nothing* can hinder it

– save, of course, conscious, willful refusal (such is the respect God has for us).

Recall the words of Saint Paul,

“*Nothing* can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:38-39)

Because this love is endless and perfect and absolute, it must take hold of everything.

It cannot be parceled into mini-portions

In a sense, it is an all-or-nothing deal, and it must take hold of everything *like fire*.

Have you ever really observed fire? What does it do?

It consumes everything in its path.

And everything added to the fire *becomes the fire*.

Jesus reveals that it is his great desire that this fire burn, that what is in his heart be given.

He is in “anguish until it is accomplished”.

This does not mean that Jesus is on the verge of an anxiety a panic attack.

“Anguish” in this case bespeaks great intensity of desire.

Jesus then speaks of a baptism with which he must be baptized.

What does he mean?

At this point in his ministry, Jesus has already been baptized by John in the Jordan.

Hmmm: has he forgotten?

Jesus is using baptism – the ritual of plunging into water

– as a metaphor for plunging into divine love.

Now, if Jesus is saying the *he* must thus be baptized,

then he is saying that something in him still needs to be plunged into divine love

– which is difficult to understand, for nothing in Jesus is outside of divine love.

Fasten your brain-belts, we are going deeper!

Glory, i.e. perfect overflowing divine love, has been withheld from his body,

during his earthly pilgrimage, so that he can experience such things as hunger and pain.

Jesus looks forward to divine love

- being poured forth supremely at the Cross
- radiating in his body at the Resurrection

There is a second aspect to this hope of Jesus.

By grace, *we* are the body of Christ, the mystical Body of Christ.

We have been so joined to Christ, that we *are* his Body, that we are *his Body*.

And we all know that divine love has not taken hold of everything in us...

No secrets there!!

Jesus wants this for us, that there only be his love in us, in our lives.

Divine love only really begins to take hold, however, if we choose

- to let it
- to cooperate

thereby entering into a *personal relationship* with Christ.

We must make a choice.

As intense as divine love may be – like fire! – God respects our freedom.

Which brings us to the question of “division”.

Because divine love is an absolute,

those whose paths she has crossed cannot, strictly speaking, remain indifferent.

Divine love is greater and deeper than any human tie, and

- adherence to divine love
- acceptance of divine love
- burning with divine love

can mean that two persons, otherwise connected, can, shall we say,  
not at all be on the same page.

Those of who you have close, non-Christian friends,

know that, as close as you may be, something deep inside of you  
is not in communion with them.

Christ, of course, opens your heart to carry them in love in a even deeper way,  
but something is not shared.

This is not to mention the more conscious rejection of Christ that we can observe.

We observe it throughout the gospels...

Think only of John 6:66, when Jesus speaks to his dearest friends, the disciples,  
of the gift of his body and blood in the Eucharist (a particular gift of fire).

What happens?

“As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life.”

If we want to be burning with God’s love, and thus be set free,  
we have a choice to make, a loving choice.

It is a simple “yes”, uttered, with faith, sustained by the Holy Spirit, each day.

If we do so, then we discover our vocation, our place, and no longer wander searching.

Saint Therese expressed it so well, with such joy:

(Therese de Lisieux + 1897; proclaimed “Doctor of the Science of Love”, 1997)

**0 Jesus, my Love, my vocation, at last I have found it ... my vocation is Love! Yes, I have found my place in the Church and it is You, 0 my God. who have given me this place; in the heart of the Church, my Mother, *I SHALL BE LOVE.***