

August 18, 2013: Setting A Fire

Dear brothers and sisters, Psychologists have coined a term for mentally disturbed persons who have an irresistible urge, an uncontrollable desire, to set destructive fires. The term is pyromaniac.

Perhaps history's most infamous pyromaniac was the Roman emperor Nero. According to reputable historians, Nero set fire to the city of Rome in 64 A.D. Rome burned for six days. Many lives were lost and property destroyed. Nero is alleged to have blamed the fledgling Christian community for the fire and began a fierce persecution against them. Nero fiddled while Rome burned!

In our gospel reading today, Jesus says to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire and how I wish it were already blazing". (Lk.12:49). Was Our Blessed Lord a pyromaniac, an arsonist? Was the Prince of Peace a man of violence?

Many biblical scholars are of the opinion that the fire spoken of by Christ is a reference to the Holy Spirit. You may recall the fire of Pentecost. The Spirit is represented by tongues of fire (Acts 2:3).

John the Baptist spoke of the one who would baptize the people with the Holy Spirit and fire (Lk.3:16). Even the disciples of Emmaus could boast of their hearts burning within them while the risen Jesus was speaking with them on the well-traveled road (Lk.24:32). Jesus wants to burn away in us all that is opposed to God's desire for our well-being and salvation.

With fire in our hearts we can love as Jesus loves, forgive as Jesus forgives and speak the truth without fear of the consequences.

This powerful gospel reading reminds me of a lecture offered by a Jewish historian some twenty-five years ago. Pinchas Lapide, a German Jew and theologian, was a first-hand witness to many of the horrors of the last century. He spoke with great passion about the dangers facing Judaism in the next generation.

Much to my amazement, he failed to cite anti-Semitism or the fringe group of Neo-Nazis as potential threats. Nor did he cite inter-faith marriages as a major concern. His main concern was the sheer complacency among the Jews of Europe. He claimed that apathy and indolence posed the major threat to the long term survival of the Jewish people.

Could not Dr. Lapide's concerns be echoed by many of our Christian leaders today?

Where is the fire? Has it been extinguished?

We Christians should become set on fire in the same way as Jesus set his disciples on fire. Only then will our zeal and fervor make a significant difference.

In today's Gospel our Lord also said: "Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." (Lk.12:50). Be reminded that a zealous Christian runs the real risk of being unpopular in today's society if (s)he embraces the teachings of Christ!

Finally, some of you may be of an age to remember the song "Light my Fire" recorded by Jim Morrison of the rock and roll group, The Doors.

Let us ask Our Lord to kindle in us the fire of His love. Let us pray that God set the fire in His Church and that we burn with love for Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Lord, Light my Fire... Light my Fire!

Amen