The 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time August 17, 2025

Sometimes sermons can be too long. A bishop spoke in the Chapel at Yale University. He spoke for 15 minutes on how the Y in Yale stood for “Youth” then for another 15 minutes about how A stood for “Ambition,” the L stood for “Leadership” and the E stood for “Energy.” After an hour, everyone was bored to tears. As the Bishop finished his message, a student came and knelt in prayer at the altar. The Bishop was impressed and asked, “Son, what was it in my message that moved you so?” The student said, “Actually, I was just thanking God that this was not the Massachusetts Institute of Technology!”

Some sermons are like Tabasco sauce: they are fiery and give you heartburn. At the end of this message, I hope you’ll consider this to be a Tabasco message and I hope you DO have heartburn–but the good kind of burning heart. In this message about divine fire, I want to ask you: Are you fired up for Jesus?

Today’s Gospel reading can feel unsettling. We’re used to thinking of Jesus as the Prince of Peace — the one who calms storms, heals the broken, and gathers the lost. Yet here, Jesus says He has come not to bring peace, but division. He speaks of fire, conflict, and even families being set against each other. What are we to make of these strong and stirring words?

Let’s begin with the fire. When Jesus says, “I came to bring fire to the earth,” He is not talking about destruction. In biblical imagery, fire often represents **purification**, **judgment**, and **the Holy Spirit**. Jesus is saying: I have come to set hearts ablaze with the truth of God. I have come to ignite a passion that cannot leave the world as it is.

Fire transforms. It consumes what is false and purifies what is true. So, when Christ speaks of fire, He is calling us to a faith that is alive, uncompromising, and bold — not lukewarm or half-hearted. He wants us to burn with love for God and neighbor, even when it costs us comfort, approval, or ease.

Then Jesus speaks of division — not because He desires strife, but because truth naturally divides. When we choose to follow Christ fully, our values begin to shift. What we prioritize — justice, mercy, holiness, self-sacrifice — may stand in contrast to the world’s values. This can create tension, even within our closest relationships.

Jesus is being painfully honest: discipleship has a cost. When we stand for truth, when we resist sin, when we live out our faith with integrity, there will be pushback. Not everyone will understand. Some may reject us. But this division is not the goal — it’s the **consequence** of choosing the narrow way of the Gospel.

And so today, we are faced with a question: **Are we willing to be set on fire by Christ?** Are we willing to let His truth reshape our lives, even if it brings conflict or sacrifice?

May we remember: the fire Jesus brings is ultimately a fire of love — a fire that purifies, refines, and calls us to deeper holiness. And though there may be division along the way, the end is peace — not a shallow peace, but the peace that comes from a heart wholly united to God.

Let us pray for courage. Let us pray for clarity. And let us never be afraid to let the fire of Christ transform us from within.

Amen.