

Homily.20OrdC.8.14.22
Saint Bernard Church
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WHERE'S THE FIRE?

Jesus cries out in today's Gospel, "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!"

What kind of fire is Jesus talking about?

We have a couple of clues elsewhere in the Bible.

Jeremiah, the author of our First Reading this morning, talks about the fire. As a prophet, he has faced constant ridicule, rejection and attempted murder. He writes in Chapter 20:

"The word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day. I say to myself, I will not mention him [referring to God], I will speak his name no more."

"But then it becomes like a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it."

In Chapter 24 of Luke's Gospel, the two men who accompanied Jesus on the walk to Emmaus, after they recognized him at the evening meal, said to each other:

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?"

These last few weeks, Fr. Jack has mentioned several times in his homilies that the second half of Luke's Gospel is all about discipleship. He's made it clear that all of us, by our baptisms, are called to be disciples. A disciple has a burning heart, on fire with love for Jesus, a desire to follow Him in every aspect of life, and an intense commitment to share his life in Jesus with others.

For most of us, the word "disciple" is not one we normally use in describing how we live a Catholic life. Why is this?

The Bible and the teachings of the Catholic Church all emphasize that we are expected to function as disciples of Jesus.

But we have a couple of problems.

The first problem is that for many of us, our formation, our development as Catholics, has some major gaps, principles that are essential to our Christian life and yet have not been given adequate attention. There are 3 major gaps.

The first is the lack of emphasis on having a personal relationship with Jesus, knowing Him, loving Him and making him the center of our lives.

The second is the lack of a relationship with the Holy Spirit, understanding His role in guiding us, giving us strength, helping us maintain our commitment to Jesus. It seems that we regard the work of the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles as historical only and not having any meaning for our lives today.

The third is an inadequate understanding of how we all participate in the sacrifice of Jesus celebrated in the Eucharist.

I had 20 years of formal Catholic education, from kindergarten through law school, and I did not receive nearly enough helpful instruction on these three issues. And I have found that my experience is very common among Catholics of all ages and backgrounds.

If these gaps were filled in, our hearts would be burning. We would be filled with new and powerful experiences of grace that would deepen our love for Jesus and inspire us to share our experiences with others.

To help us fill in these gaps, something I strongly recommend would be the Discovering Christ series which will be offered here beginning September 14th. It will deepen our relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It's one of three ChristLife series we offer each year here at St. Bernard's. The others are Following Christ and Sharing Christ.

I need to add that our culture creates other obstacles to our being disciples.

As is all too clear these days, Catholics in many ways can do better in the world if we are less Catholic. There is a strong tendency to make religion fit the way we want to live, rather than conform to the strong demands true religion makes on us.

So we are tempted to choose the ways of the world over the ways of the Church. And what does the Church offer us?

In the words of a great man of the Church, Bishop Fulton Sheen:

“Entering into the Church lifts us into another world – the supernatural world. It gives us a new set of values, a new objective, new ways of thinking, new standards of judgment, all of which are in opposition to the spirit of the world.”

Jesus says in the Gospel of John: “I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

What is so ironic is that the world, which rejects Jesus, the world that is all around us and exhibiting more and more confusion and chaos, desperately needs Jesus. They need His love, His discipline, His truth, His grace.

The challenge for each of us is not to withdraw from the world, but to influence the world more than the world influences us. To embrace the life that Jesus offers us and take it to a world starving for Jesus and what He can do for humanity.

I invite you to equip yourselves to live the life of a disciple by participating in the ChristLife series here at St. Bernard's.

Commit your life to Jesus. Invite the Holy Spirit into your life. Develop a love for Jesus that creates a burning sensation in your heart. And help set the earth on fire.