

August 14, 2022

Jer 38:4-6, 8-10; Heb 12:1-4; Lk 12:49-53

I was watching a video on the internet the other day. It was of a person restoring an old rusty knife - I know, I have some strange tastes in what I watch. Well, in order to clean off the crud and rust, the man used some chemicals, and also applied a torch. The flame of the torch didn't harm the underlying metal, but it did burn away the crud on the knife. You see the metal was fireproof, the crud was not - so the question to ask yourself is: "am I fireproof"?

You see fire has many qualities. It brings heat and light, it can destroy (like it did to the crud), it can clean (like it did to the steel of the blade). It has movement, and it can harden metal making it stronger. Fire is a biblical symbol of the Holy Spirit. Like fire, the Holy Spirit is always in motion, it burns away that which is not of God and it cleans and strengthens that which is of God. In the Gospel, Jesus says *I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!* He is speaking about the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist says of Jesus: *I baptize you with water; but He is coming who is mightier than I, and ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.* The fire of the Holy Spirit is meant cleanse and strengthen. But not everyone will be prepared for it, not everyone will accept it, not every one will want to be cleaned. These varying response to the action of the Holy Spirit will create division - because some will accept and some will reject the action of the Spirit. That is why Jesus, bringer of the Spirit says: *Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three* - then He lists out various family relationships that will be disrupted. Divisions will come when some accept his truth and others do not.

In this passage, Jesus is actually quoting from the prophet Micah. The prophet goes on after these lines to speak of a consolation and reunion of the people that have become divided. Jesus' goal is to provide a means of ultimate union for those who accept Him. Although the fire will initially bring division, those who stay in it (that is those who allow themselves to be bathed in the power of the Spirit) will be made more bendable (as metal is made more bendable with high heat). Eventually the heat can make two pieces of metal soft enough to be joined together. Both cleansed of their impurities and made soft they can become one - and be strengthened in the process.

But this can only happen if the metal stays in the fire, and it can only stay in the fire if it is fireproof. So are you fireproof? Can you bear to be in contact with the sometimes uncomfortable process of the Lord cleansing you of your impurities? When Jesus says *There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!* - He is speaking of His passion and death. Only by going through the pain of suffering and death is He able to rise from the dead. Only by us accepting the crosses the Lord permits in our lives is there transformation. Without the Cross there is no resurrection. Without the fire, the crud is not burned off, and without the heat of fire the metal will not become soft enough to be joined. God sometimes permits situations in life that are a trial by fire, and it is only when softened by that fire can His work of being the blacksmith and shaping us and joining us to others can happen.

We think that strength is shown in doing it our own way, not giving in, not allowing ourselves to bend, not surrendering to the cross that Our Lord permits to be there - yet we heard today that trusting in the Father, Jesus *endured the cross, despising its shame*. God will not allow us to be tested beyond our abilities, and if we make a lot of our own crosses in life, there is less room for Him to permit the ones that will truly transfer us. Change, cleansing, and joining are sometimes painful, but it is better to follow the Lord and to engage in the process of cleansing that the Spirit brings - and bear with Him the crosses we have to carry in life - only then do we follow Jesus through the crosses to the resurrection.

We heard in the send reading: *let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus*.

Jesus did not shy from doing the will of the Father, He did not stop from suffering to allow the Spirit to come and burn off the crud that was our sins that he took upon Himself. He kept His eye facing forward and, and the reading goes on to say: *Consider how he endured ... that you may not grow weary and lose heart*. So in the race of this life, keep your eyes fixed on the finish line (like the runners in a race), and keep going no matter how many people cross the line ahead of you (like the runners in a race). Be fireproof and allow the flame of the Spirit to touch you, and clean you. Let yourself be made soft by the heat of the flame and permit yourself to meld with others - bringing unity where the heat could cause division. This is Jesus' ultimate goal - to show us how fireproof we can be, to be the blacksmith shaping us, and in the end to produce one wonderful finished product in a unified Church in heaven.