



August 14, 2022

Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"I have come to set the earth on fire,
and how I wish it were already blazing!"*

Luke 12:49



Dear Friends;

Some friends of mine have recently acquired one of those propane powered pizza ovens. I have been fortunate to attend a couple of build-your-own pizza parties. This special oven with stone floor makes perfect pizza crust. I have dreamed of building an adobe wood fired oven. The romantic in me likes the idea of baking bread or roasting meat in an oven formed from the earth. Over the years I have looked at do-it-yourself versions of earthen ovens. Such a project is labor intensive and time consuming, but how cool to have an earthen oven!

Today Jesus tells us, his disciples, that he has *"come to set a fire on the earth."* The scholar John Pilch says in the Aramaic language that Jesus spoke, the word that is translated as "earth" can also be translated as "earth oven." This would be a more culturally plausible translation. Ovens made of mud or clay, would have been a common feature in first century Palestinian villages.

Wood was scarce in that part of the world, so these ovens were fueled by camel-dung patties. They are dried and salted so that they would burn better. Salt has a mysterious property. A block of salt on the floor of the oven kept the fire going as much as the salt crystals in the dried dung. Eventually the salt block loses its catalytic property. Then it is thrown out. (Luke mentions this later in his Gospel. 14:34-35)

Jesus comes to ignite the oven. He is the catalyst. His message is going to cause sparks to fly. Arguments will erupt as people and families quarrel over their opinion of Jesus. And people will divide over his message. To follow Jesus is an invitation to move out of the normal social bonds of blood and kinship. Jesus is forming a new kind of family. It will not be defined by nation, tribe, language, or ethnicity. The family of Jesus will be defined by those willing to obey the command of God and who are on fire with Divine Love.

To follow Jesus on this path means that sometimes we must separate ourselves from family, clan, and national allegiance. Jesus separated himself out from his own family because of his Divine call. In the Gospel of Mark, the family thinks he has gone mad; he left the family, he does not do the same work as his father, and he is going around as a lay teacher. This was a challenge to his culture. And Jesus is just as much of a challenge to our own culture. Jesus comes to bake a new kind of bread; nourished by the bread of his teaching, Jesus shapes us into his risen body, nourishment for the life of the world.

Our culture likes to take pride in its faith in God. But then we put God in a box and silence the voice of religion in the public square. We believe that religion and politics cannot mix. We limit clergy to a prayer before legislative sessions, and we bless our troops and conflicts. But criticism and protests from people of faith are not welcome. If we silence religion and the prophetic voice among us, who then among us will be the salt the ignites the fire of our earth oven?

The word *shalom* in Hebrew has eight distinct meanings but it never means a well-ordered silence, everything in its place, or stillness. The culture of the Middle East is loud, active, and spontaneous. Jesus's Jewish concept of peace is children running and yelling, adults shouting and quarreling, others singing, and everything in delightful disarray. And in this cacophony of life the spark of the Divine ignites us with the flame of love. Let us set our world on fire!

Peace,

Fr Ron

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