

Rev. Derek Fairman

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I will finish speaking about faith and the fire of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul in the second reading explains that he is already being poured out like a libation. Here he likely has in mind the Lord Jesus, who poured Himself out upon the Cross in Sacrifice. He also mentions that he is nearing the end of his life, and he looks forward to the crown that awaits him, if he is faithful to the Lord to the end.

When it comes to sacrifice, the image of the Unburnt Bush eventually developed further. For a fire, one needs a base or an altar, something that can withstand the heat of the fire which gives the fire an immovable, inflammable base that provides stability. One also needs a flame, and wood or some source of fuel. There also needs to be a victim, or something offered. One could just burn wood, for heat, but to make a sacrifice, there is something offered on the altar.

Three gifts which the Holy Spirit brings us in the Sacrament of Confirmation are knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Knowledge answers the questions of who, what, where, and when. Understanding answers the question how; we *understand how* something works. Wisdom answers the question why; *why* must something be this way versus another way? These gifts help us to know God more deeply and they can help us to lift our hearts to God.

As we recognize in the Mass, we lift our hearts to the Lord. The fuel is what happens to us during our week, our joys, and our sorrows. Whenever we come to Mass, we call to mind all that the Lord has done for us. We call to mind all the good things that God has given to us, and we offer Him thanks for those good things. Even the bad things that God has given, we thank Him for the lessons that we have learned, and we can offer those things to Him too. We offer up our (undeserved) sufferings for those whom we love. Granted there is only one physical altar in the church, mystically there are many altars in our hearts and souls.

The more that we pray, apart from Mass, the more that the Holy Spirit can make use of the events of our week. What we read, what we have felt, what we have experienced, can be collected and recalled at Mass, so that we can offer it at Mass, and the more that we pray apart from Mass, the better. Imagine prayer as gathering the wood for the fire. We might remember at the beginning of this series, the Lord told His disciples that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, they could move mulberry trees into the sea. We might also remember the importance of being persistent in prayer from last Sunday.

The Lord Jesus this Sunday teaches us humility and its importance in prayer. If prayer, especially the prayer that we spend outside of Mass, is like collecting the wood for the fire, then it is important to collect wood that is powerful, that will burn. It is important to be persistent, and not get weary of gathering the wood for fuel. It is also important to be humble, to not think that somehow the flame is ours, or that gathering the wood is all our effort. That is the mistake that the Pharisee made, of bragging about his accomplishments as though they were all his own. Lifting our hearts is not about exalting ourselves.

In our souls, the Holy Spirit is the flame. We are not the flame. The Holy Spirit, as we heard previously, can be stirred into flame. The Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles and the Church at Pentecost as flames of tongues. Again, if the flame is true, the Holy Spirit is the fire, not doubt or fear.

Perhaps this flame feels like it has been dissipated. Maybe it seems like someone has thrown cold water on this flame. This could be due to the anxieties that come into our lives, that we carry too much of a burden, and we have no energy. This could be due to doubts, that we feel lost or somehow left out. Since the Eucharist means thanksgiving, maybe we are not sure why we should be thankful. This is especially true whenever we have crosses to bear, whenever it seems like few things are going right.

We can learn from the tax collector. He did not have a great offering to make in his heart. Yet he made what little he had in sincerity and truth. The tax collector could only offer his contrition in his heart. He did not offer his heart in exaltation, to show his achievements to others. He did not build a great fire using lots of wood, as the Pharisee did. Rather, he was on his way to a deep fire, a fire that could cleanse his heart.

We might not initially want to offer our sorrows and doubts and so on to the Lord. We might think that this is not what He wants. Yet He wanted the contrition and honesty from the tax collector, rather than the bragging of the Pharisee. We lift our hearts to God, even if we think that we have little to offer.

As we approach the altar, we thank the Lord for sending us His Holy Spirit, and we thank the Holy Spirit for bringing us His gifts. We are grateful, but we also want to be vigilant, that we receive the Holy Spirit and not an impostor. We lift our hearts to the Lord, and ask Him to help us offer the best of our hearts that we can. We ask the Lord to send His Holy Spirit, so that the flame of divine love in our hearts will not dissipate.