

(English translation)

Città Nuova, 25 July, 2001

Word of Life

‘I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!’ (Lk 12:49)

In the Old Testament fire symbolizes the word of God as spoken by a prophet. But it also signifies divine justice that purifies God’s people by passing among them.

The Word of Jesus is the same. It builds up, but while it does so it destroys whatever has no real substance, whatever must fall, whatever is vanity, and leaves standing only the truth.

John the Baptist said of Jesus: ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire’ (Lk 3:16), foretelling Christian baptism inaugurated on the day of Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the appearance of tongues of fire (see Acts 2:3).

This then is Jesus’ mission: to cast fire on earth, to bring the Holy Spirit with his renewing and purifying strength.

‘I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!’

Jesus gives us the Spirit. But how does the Spirit act?

He acts by pouring love into us. It’s the love that, following his wish, we must keep burning in our hearts.

What is this love like?

It’s not an earthly, limited love. It’s gospel love. It’s universal like that of the Heavenly Father who sends rain and sunshine on everyone, good and bad, including enemies (see Mt 5:45).

It’s a love that expects nothing from others but always takes the initiative and is the first to love.

It’s a love that makes itself one with every person: suffering with them, rejoicing with them, worrying with them, hoping with them. And it does so, if need be, in a concrete way, with deeds. A love that’s not simply a matter of feelings, not just words.

A love where we love Christ in our brother or sister, remembering his words: ‘You did it to me’ (Mt 25:40).

A love that leads to reciprocity, to bringing about mutual love with others.

And since this love is the visible, concrete expression of our gospel life, it emphasizes and gives worth then to the word we can and must offer in order to evangelize.

‘I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!’

Love is like a fire. What matters is that it stays alight. And for a fire to stay alight it must always burn something. First of all it must burn up our egoistic self, and it does this because, by loving, we are fully directed towards the other: either towards God, by doing his will, or towards our neighbours, by helping them.

Even a small fire, if it’s fed, can become a huge blaze. It can become the blaze of that love, peace and universal fraternity which Jesus brought on earth.

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