

Sometimes we have this picture in our head of a nice, kind Jesus, who was always gentle and gentle and doesn't cause anyone any trouble. If we have this kind of image of Jesus in our heads, then it is merely one of our own creation, not in line with reality.

Jesus was a real person and as we see from today's Gospel, He was full of life and fire. Even though we see Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane completely weighed down with the full burden of what He must do for the Father for our salvation, we see in today's Gospel that He was always consumed with the fire to do what He had to do to save us. So let's look at His words again.

“There is a baptism with which I must be baptized...”

What is He talking about here? He's talking about His Passion and Death. This is the figurative baptism to which he refers. So He already knows what lays ahead of Him and instead of shrinking from it, He wants it, so much so that He says He is in anguish until it comes.

“...and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished.”

Another translation renders it “What constraint I am under until it is completed.” So He feels His life constrained until He gets to the Passion.

Now these are not the words of a masochist looking for suffering. These are the words of love for us, for our salvation. This is the fire He is talking about, the fire of love, and so full is He of the fire of love to accomplish our salvation, that He is in anguish for even having to wait to get to His Passion.

So, do you see here the purity of His love? For you and me, even in our greatest moments of love, there is always still that self-interest in the background, the mixed motives, the desire for our own satisfaction. We see none of this in Jesus – His love is completely pure, like a roaring fire.

“I have come to set a fire upon the earth, O how I wish it were already blazing.”

Here He is talking about us. Jesus desires that the great fire of Divine Love which consumes His heart should also consume our hearts. In the saints, we get glimpses of what this means:

Blessed Mother Teresa
Saint John Paul II
Saint Vincent de Paul

Rather than trying to put into words what this means that Jesus wishes to set a fire upon the earth, it's easier just to point to the saints in which He has already done this and then we understand what He means.

Mother Teresa – almost unfathomable love she had for the poorest of the poor. This came from the fire of Divine Love which burned in her heart. For me, when I see this kind of love, I think, that I am way too weak to love like this. I mean, I love, but I am so far from this kind of love. But even in our weakness, we can ask the Lord to give us this kind of love. He will give us the

grace and offer us the opportunities if we ask, and that's the thing, God will give us the grace but then we have to put that love in action. That's how the love becomes real.

Jesus on the cross

Mother Teresa cleaning sores and bedpans of the poor

Saint John Paul II pouring himself out for the Church

That's how the fire grows in us – God gives us the grace and then we act on it, our hearts are opened to receive even more grace to love and God then gives us the opportunity to love more. And on, and on, and on.

But if we refuse to act on the grace, then the fire cannot grow and just dies away. But God doesn't pull any punches about the suffering and self-denial that love entails. Look at the readings today.

Jeremiah – put in a cistern

Saint Paul – shed the blood

Gospel – division, cross

But love is worth it. No matter what the suffering, love is its own reward and draws us more intimately in communion with God, who is love.

So ask for love and then do and then ask for more grace for love, then do again. If we do this, indeed we will find that Christ has enkindled a fire in our hearts which will blaze into the world.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 2016.