

Sermon for Pentecost
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Holy Nativity, Plano
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I want to focus on one particular image from today's readings. The image of fire. On Pentecost, the disciples all saw the Holy Spirit descend upon each of the others as a tongue of fire. And that fire that descends upon them sets a great blaze across the entire Roman Empire, and beyond it to the ends of the earth. The fire in the disciples touches others and sets them alight. Those set burning on the day of Pentecost touch even more others, and the blaze is increased. This chain has continued down to the present day. The same fire has been burning now for two millennia. In one sense, you might say that this fire *is* the Church of Jesus Christ. Wherever the Holy Spirit is active to establish the reign of Christ and the Kingdom of God, there is the church.

You all know how much I value the intellectual content of our Faith. I have taught on the Christian worldview, and the Bible, and theology. And all those things are absolutely crucial for us to have in line. But this image right here is what it all boils down to. We can have all those other things; but if we aren't set on fire with God the Holy Spirit, our hearts are simply dead wood. And dead, rotting wood doesn't give light or heat to the world around it.

What we're supposed to be is a great burning furnace. The Holy Spirit that dwells within us isn't just some nice platitude like the power of positive thinking. It's the power of life and death. Dwelling within us. When Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and gives them the authority to forgive or retain sins, he is not joking around. But he also says, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." So the power with which we are bestowed is to be channeled and spent in the service of others.

Fire gives light, so that people can see. Fire gives heat, so that people can live. Fire also consumes everything that is not pure. If you are on fire with the Holy Spirit, then your life will give light and heat. It will also naturally set other people on fire. It will also consume everything in you and your life that is not of God.

Fire is dangerous and frightening. It gives light and life. But it isn't cuddly. It's a power beyond our own. St. Paul gives us a list of things that the fire of the Holy Spirit does in people. "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge ... to another faith ... to another gifts of healing ... to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues." How would any of you like to

be prophets, or miracle workers? How would you like to have the gift of prayer for healing? St. Paul seems to assume that there will be such people with such callings in each Christian community.

You see, being on fire isn't about me. It isn't about you. It isn't about what we get out of being here. It's about light and heat and purification. It's about the power of God at work in us, among us, and in the world around us. And that power will change everything. It will change us. It will change the world.

Of course, all of this begs the question: Are we on fire with the Holy Spirit? We always have the option to close the damper and starve the fire until it goes out. God will get his work done whether we participate or not. Or we can let it blaze and pass it on to set others alight. We can be a part of what God is doing.

Today, we are going to light up little Emily Federico. We are going to baptize her and set the fire of the Holy Spirit in her. But it will be the task of parents, godparents, and the whole community to shelter the flame that is in her, so that it can mature and spread until she can be on fire for herself.

Only a community that is on fire can nurture others in flame. Only a church on fire with the Holy Spirit can do the work of God in the power of God to the glory of God.