

Jesus said to his disciples: “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!” (Lk 12:49). Jesus is looking forward to Pentecost when tongues of fire will fill the Apostles with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The apostles will gain courage and wisdom to boldly proclaim the Good News. <sup>i</sup>

Before the coming of the Spirit, we know that Jesus must undergo his ‘baptism of fire,’ his passion and death. Fire also speaks of judgment at the end of a person’s life and at the end of time. Fire will be used to purify so that the faithful follower of Christ may accompany God in eternity. For those who reject the Good News, the Just Judge will send the unrepentant to the fires of Gehenna.

Jesus asks rhetorically: “Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division” (Lk 12:51). Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and He longs to offer salvation to all. However, we know that with our free will, we are given the opportunity to accept or reject that offer. Our actions have consequences and so if we are opposed to Christ, he brings division. This division will even affect household relationships. Such was foretold by the prophet Micah: “For the son belittles his father, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and your enemies are members of your household” (Mic 7:6).<sup>ii</sup>

However, there is a silver lining to this cloud of division. The prophet Micah helps us to understand that division serves a purpose and ultimately Israel will regather and come back stronger. “After that punishment God will bring the people back to their land and establish perpetual peace. The will of God for human beings is that they do justice, love goodness, and walk humbly with God” (Intro to Micah).

There are times when we might need to use fire to heal and restore. When we admonish a sinner, we must do it with love to help a person reconcile with God. We should also fast and pray for the benefit of the one who is going astray. While we always hope and pray for peace rather than division, ultimately, we must recognize that God comes first. There are times when we must pursue a path of division to be faithful to God.

It is helpful to focus on what is essential. This past weekend, Cardinal Dolan outlined some of the non-negotiable tenets of our faith.<sup>iii</sup> Although he was speaking on another topic, they are certainly most applicable here:

- While in the world, we are not of the world, and thus our guiding principles come from the Gospel, revelation, and the [tradition and heritage] of the Church’s settled teaching.
- The innate dignity of every human person and the inherent sacredness of all human life are the towering moral lighthouses on our path.
- Our journey through this life back to our true and eternal home of heaven is most effectively accomplished precisely as a journey as we walk with and accompany each other, with Jesus as our guide, his Mother and the saints, and we sinners at each other’s side.
- We pay special attention to those at the side of the road, especially those who are sick, weak, poor, or unable to keep up with us.
- Mercy, love, invitation, humility, joy, selfless generous service, and good example are our only tools ... never harshness, condemnation, or pride.

We are called to follow Christ; we are called to witness to the faith and set the world on fire. Like the Apostles at Pentecost, we need the energy and direction that comes from the Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth.

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<sup>i</sup> Gadenz, Pablo T.. The Gospel of Luke. P. 247.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid 247-248

<sup>iii</sup> catholicnewsagency.com/news/249333/cardinal-dolan-lists-7-non-negotiables-for-the-synod-on-synodality