



Dear Parishioners,

We sometimes hear the expression that we need to fight fire with fire. In the practical world, firefighters often set backfires or controlled fires to contain a forest fire by depriving it of fuel. In a metaphoric sense, this phrase means to respond in like kind, to use the same weapons to attack another who is attacking us. In both cases, fire is used in a destructive sense with the hope that it produces a happy outcome. Fire – really and metaphorically – is filled with contradictions. Fire can destroy ... it can also purify. Fire can burn ... it can also warm. Fire can blind ... it can also give light. Fire can consume ... it can also melt. Fire is a powerful image. In the Gospel this weekend, fire is used in two (2) ways: fire can destroy ... fire can also bring Life.

John the Baptist prepared “the way of the Lord,” by calling people to repentance so they would not be “thrown into the fire” of “the coming wrath.” John announced impending judgment and offered a baptism of repentance. John also announced One to come who would enact that judgment and bring a baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire. The fire of judgment will destroy those who are fruitless. The fire of the Holy Spirit will help the faithful bear good fruit. Advent is, in the end, about jumping into the fire. This is our time to embrace our Baptism, to allow the Holy Spirit to set us afire anew for living the Gospel.

John baptized with water. Followers of Jesus are baptized with “the Holy Spirit and fire.” The image of fire reminds us that we are purified and made holy by our Baptism. We receive the Holy Spirit and God’s Life is within us. This is what empowers us to bear fruit. All we need to do is to say “yes” to God’s will and be faithful to our baptismal call. We also remember that Baptism plunges us into the mystery of Christ’s dying and rising. Conforming ourselves to Christ, we take on our own challenges to die to self for the sake of others.

Advent is a time to rekindle the urgency of living our baptismal commitment, about following Christ faithfully, and about producing good fruit. In the midst of our busyness of our Christmas preparations, we are called to take a few minutes in prayer each day to welcome Christ’s Presence ... to recognize the Christ in the other who is less fortunate than we are ... to greet Christ our Light in the myriads of lights we use to decorate our homes. Let’s be on fire with the wonder of this season. Let’s prepare to celebrate Christ’s incarnated Presence among us. Let’s open ourselves to the purifying and enkindling Presence of the Holy Spirit within us and among us. This is what our baptismal commitment calls us to.

This is a time of the year when many opportunities to think of others arise. The red kettle and the ringing bell remind us that others are less fortunate than us and need our help. At the same time, we cannot forget to be mindful of those with whom we live, work, and play, especially at a time when busyness might cause us to be tired and short-tempered and getting our own things taken care of might cause us to be short-sighted so that we do not see the need of those close to us. This is a time when we may have plenty of opportunities to repent for being too distracted or too busy or too intent on getting something finished. It is also a time to be on fire with the love and care we have for family and friends. Advent is, in the end, about jumping into the fire.

May Saint Michael the Archangel defend, guide, protect, and intercede for us always! May you and your families be well and safe! Have a great week!

~ Fr. Larry