

Monsignor Dennis Sheehan
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Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Liturgical Year C

Wait just a minute Jesus! My life is already a constant rush of chaos, business, fast-forward and non-stop. I come to church looking for a little peace and quiet consolation. I'm looking to center a bit on this Sunday morning. I'm here to get grounded, to find the stable and dependable Jesus.

If that's what you're thinking today, I'm with you. An hour in a nice safe building, the cool of air conditioning, the solace of prayer and good music.

But then there's Jesus today. "I have come to set the earth on fire..." Peace? "No, from me you get division. I'll split up families, divide homes, turn parents against children". Fire!

This, frankly, is the side of Jesus and his Gospel that I dread whenever it comes up. But here it is... fire!

Fire can be good or bad. But good or bad, you can't ignore it. God knows that. Look at a few places where fire burned in the Scriptures.

Remember Moses and the burning bush? Moses, you recall, was a murderer on the lam from the law. Here he is in the wilderness hoping everyone has forgotten him. But God seeks him out. "Hey Moses, your people need you. I'll set you on fire and you'll set your people free." That's just what God did; he set Moses on fire. Fire can be good, and fire can be bad; but you can't ignore fire.

So Moses takes the people out in the desert. They moan and groan at the hardship. God gives them food. But God comes to them as guide...in a pillar of...you got it...fire!

The Letter to the Hebrews put it this way: "Our God is a consuming fire." A fire. You can love God, you can hate God, but you can't ignore God!

I'm sure the disciples of Jesus just wanted a little peace and security. After Jesus' resurrection, there they were together in the upper room. Maybe their pews were bolted to the floor. Maybe they were going through the familiar, comforting routine of Sabbath prayer. Then the building began to rumble, the doors swung open, and someone from somewhere yelled, "Fire!"

It was fire all right. It was the fire of God's spirit we call Pentecost. It set those sleepy disciples on fire, and they went out to cast the fire of faith on the waiting world. Fire is good, and fire is bad, but it always gets your attention. You can't ignore it.

Jesus comes to us today, looking for a few combustible followers. A real church is like a furnace. It radiates warmth and drives out chill.

What's your choice and mine in the face of all this harsh stuff? "I have come to set the world on fire." Jesus says it's not easy. People probably will react negatively if you become too much of a firebrand. There are those among us who like the cool, stable, and predictable church experience. But then we're very far indeed from the incendiary group Jesus calls us to be.

Imagine a church – here and all around the world – fired up by the Gospel. It would be a glorious sight to behold. Jesus really did come to set the world on fire.

Watch out. You're combustible.