

Twentieth Sunday Per Annum (C)
August 14, 2016.

I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed (Lk. 12: 49-50).

By means of a familiar substance and image, *fire*, Our Lord speaks to us about His Sacred Passion. St. Bede the Venerable paraphrases Our Lord's words and writes: *'I have a baptism to be baptized with', that is, I have first to be sprinkled with the drops of My own Blood, and then to inflame the hearts of believers by the fire of the Spirit (Catena Aurea in Lucam, p.468).* During Lent this year the point of reference for our reflection and prayer was the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas: *The Passion of Christ completely suffices to fashion our lives.* It is to His Passion that each one of us must conform our own life. Our Lord's Passion is the Mystery that we celebrate at every Mass and through grace, imitation and love, we endeavour to conform ourselves to the truth and power of this Mystery.

The sacred author of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts us today with these words: *Brothers and sisters: since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the Cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God (12:1-2).* We are encouraged to gaze upon the Crucified Saviour as the model of what we ourselves are to become. Christian discipleship is the embrace of the Cross, leading to a participation in its Mystery. We who endeavour to be disciples of Jesus can indeed participate in His sacrifice. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that *the cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the 'one mediator between God and men.'* *But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, 'the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery' is offered to all men. He calls his disciples to 'take up [their] cross and follow [him],' for Christ also suffered for [us] leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps.'* (# 618). We endeavour to respond to Love Crucified with a crucified love, a sacrificial love.

This takes us to the very heart of our faith and the appropriation of this truth marks a point of transition or maturity and we go from a mechanical observance of religion to a life of deep devotion. Such a life produces fruits of holiness in great abundance and these benefit the world at large. Last Sunday, Father Albert spoke to us very simply about his work with the poor in Honduras. The hardships of life as he labours to share the Gospel of salvation and which he evidently bears with joy are evidence of the fire that Our Lord speaks of in the Gospel. Your generous response to his work is also evidence of this fire, of this supernatural charity that inspires great deeds of love. This willingness to share with others not only our material goods but also our spiritual goods speaks to the power of the Mystery of the Lord's Passion at work in us.

We must never underestimate what this Mystery can effect in us; provided of course that we allow this Mystery to transform our hearts and minds. I never cease to marvel at the goodness that I encounter. Yes, at times we also encounter opposition and even persecution but these can be overcome through prayer, penance and an unwavering trust in the power of God's grace. By virtue

of our discipleship all of us are called to share in Our Lord's redemptive suffering. To some however, it is given to be conformed to Our Lord's Passion and to share in *the sprinkling of Our Lord's Precious Blood*, as spoken of by St. Bede. In an extraordinary manner, St. Pio of Pietralcina was so chosen, even to the point of bearing in his own body the wounds of Our Lord's Passion. We see in those who suffer *like Christ* a chosen soul, one who has been marked out and we approach such a person with profound reverence. Such is the transformative power of suffering patiently and lovingly borne that it affects both the one who suffers and those who witness the suffering. We understand this human reality of suffering as we do because of *Christ Crucified, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor.1:23-24).

Today, the Martyrology, the Book of Saints and Martyrs commemorates St. Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish Franciscan Priest who on this day in 1941 was killed in Auschwitz. Many are familiar with his heroic act of charity by which he willingly took the place of a prisoner condemned to death by starvation. Our Lord said, *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (Jn. 15: 12-13). St. Maximilian was the last of the ten condemned men to die. According to an eye witness, also a prisoner in the camp, in his prison cell, St. Maximilian led the prisoners in prayer to Our Lady. Each time the guards checked on him, he was standing or kneeling in the middle of the cell and looking calmly at those who entered. After two weeks of dehydration and starvation, only he remained alive. The guards wanted the cell emptied, so they gave him a lethal injection of carbolic acid. His remains were cremated on August 15th, the Feast of Our Lady's Assumption. The heroic self-sacrifice of this Martyr of Charity was the fruit of his supernatural love of God. This supernatural love for God is what enables us also to love our spouses, our children, our friends and even strangers heroically; that is to say, sacrificially. We must foster this love of God, especially here in our church where the Sacred Mysteries are celebrated with reverence and devotion. The acts of piety that we make here are not mechanical or superficial; they are expressive of our deep devotion and of the exercise of our common priesthood as we offer the Sacrifice of Praise. As we worship so we become. As we follow Our Lord along the path of devout humility and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth, we take our place in *the great cloud of witnesses* as we journey to the Heavenly Jerusalem. May the intercession of St. Maximilian help us to love one another with heroic love and to love God with hearts enflamed by the *fire of the Holy Spirit*.