

October 24: The Fire of Mission

The first verse of today's Gospel captures Jesus' focus on his mission to bring "fire" upon the earth, to accomplish his God-given task of evangelization, the proclamation of his Father's Kingdom. This verse reminds one of the classical statement by theologian Emil Brunner in 1931: "*The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning.*"

Brunner eloquently asserts that every Christian who receives the Word of God "receives along with it the duty of passing this Word on.... Mission work does not arise from any arrogance in the Christian Church; mission is its cause and its life....Where there is no mission, there is no Church; and where there is neither Church nor mission, there is no faith.... Mission, Gospel preaching, is the spreading out of the fire which Christ has thrown upon the earth. He who does not propagate this fire shows that he is not burning. He who burns propagates the fire."

"This 'must' is both things—an urge and a command. An urge, because living faith feels God's purpose as its own. 'Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel,' says Paul. Necessity is laid upon him. But also, he ought to preach; with the gift he receives the obligation: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel.' Whether Christ's command was uttered just in these words, we do not know exactly. But there can be no doubt that He had sent out His disciples with the strict order to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to all the world."

Jesus felt the urgency of his mission to bring "fire" upon this earth. He has shared this mission with every baptized Christian. As fire only genuinely exists when it is actually burning, we are only the Church and Jesus' authentic disciples only when we engage in mission. Are you ablaze? Have you caught Jesus' "Gospel Fire"?