

Commentary for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time



the Lord

The Spiritual Life--Bursting with Excitement for

He couldn't do it. He couldn't hold it in. He was bursting. Jeremiah, the prophet of the first reading, couldn't control himself. He knew that if he proclaimed the truth burning within him he would be attacked by those who did not believe. They had attacked him before. He had been put into prison. He had been thrown into a cistern. He had been held in stocks. Maybe they would leave him alone if he just kept quiet. But he couldn't do it. When you really believe in something, you can't hold it in or you will burst. Jeremiah believed in God. And he had a message. God's message was burning within him. He couldn't endure keeping quiet. He had to let it out.

The word of the LORD has brought me
derision and reproach all the day.
I say to myself, I will not mention him,
I will speak in his name no more.
But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart,
imprisoned in my bones;
I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.

If today were not a Sunday, we would be celebrating the Memorial of St. Augustine. St. Augustine recognized the fire within. When after trying all the world had to offer he realized that he could not be

happy ignoring the fire within and seeking happiness in the material possessions of the world, St. Augustine wrote, “Our hearts are made for you O God, and can not rest until they rest in you.”

Jesus said, “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing.” We, as disciples of Jesus, have within us the burning fire of the Lord which impels us to transform the world.

Spirituality is what we do with the fire that is within us. Spirituality is the discipline and habits that we live by that lead us to a greater integration of our bodies, minds and souls. All discipline takes effort. And like the lump of clay that became the beautiful teacup, the effort has a cost. But the result is wonderful: we become one in the Lord. Of course we could embrace the opposite of spirituality and ignore the fire of God within us, or douse the fire and have no energy for God. That is easy to do if we are willing to sacrifice all meaning for life and become a spiritual couch potato living a superficial life.

Some spiritual writers warn against dissipation. Technically dissipation means a wasteful expenditure or consumption. We are dissipated when we ignore the energy, the fire of God within us, waste it, and hide it behind the meaningless aspects of life, what is on TV, who is dating whom, what Hollywood star did what, etc.

Let’s apply this to our children and to ourselves. If we do not regulate our children’s activities, but instead allow our children to live in front of the TV or in front of the computer, if the great accomplishments take place on a video game screen, then we are teaching them that distractions are a good thing that they should cherish. If we do not develop within our children good habits of prayer, we are leading them to a dissipated life. But when we make sure that our children are developing their minds and bodies properly, when we encourage them to be the very best people they can become, we allow them to use the energy God gives them. We allow our children to be spiritual.

It is the same with ourselves. If we do not take time to reflect on our own lives, to relate to others, to relate to God, to pray, to choose ways that we can better reflect the image of God that we were formed to bring to the world, if we do not impose a discipline upon ourselves, then we are squandering the energy, the fire, God gives us. But if we take up our crosses and do our best to make sense of the world by making sense of our own existence, then we will take that energy, that fire of the Lord, and throw it upon the world.

The Spirit of Jesus Christ within us, the Holy Spirit, unites every aspect of our being into a complete person with reason for existence. The spiritual person lives a meaningful life because he or she knows that there is nothing the world can throw at him that can distract him from the real mission in life: to throw the fire of Christ upon the earth and watch it burn with the Love of the Lord.

In last Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus commended Peter as being led by the Holy Spirit. Peter had proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God. In today’s Gospel, Jesus reproves Peter. Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from carrying out the Father’s plan. That’s why Jesus called him a devil, someone who is fighting against the will of God. Peter went from being at one with the Spirit and recognizing that Jesus was the Christ, to being controlled by the fears of life, and therefore to opposing the spiritual. Peter was not at peace. Peter had a long way to go before he could look at a cross prepared for him and peacefully accept a new service of God through his imminent martyrdom. But, eventually, Peter was able to put his life in God’s hands and peacefully accept the ending of this life and the beginning of the

next.

All of us have met men or women who are truly spiritual. How did we recognize them? It is not because we heard them say pious platitudes. We didn't feel drawn to them because they forced clichés down our throats. Instead we recognized the calmness with which they reflected the presence of the Lord within them. The truly spiritual are people who are at peace with themselves, with others, and even with a world that might oppose them. St. Maximilian Kolbe could sit in a starvation cell in a Nazi concentration camp at peace with himself and with God. He could throw the fire of God's love upon the earth. He was spiritual. Perhaps your husband or wife, your mother or father, grandmother or grandfather, have passed away in peace knowing that they were being transformed from one life to another. They were spiritual. Blessed John Paul II and Blessed Mother Theresa both emanated a peace within themselves. They were spiritual.

We also can be spiritual. We can focus on the center of life, God within us. Then we will realize that everything else, even sickness and death, are secondary to what really matters, our own unique reflections of God's love. And God's love will never be taken from us.

That is the peace of the spiritual.

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