

“When Pentecost day came round...something appeared to them like tongues of fire, these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak foreign languages...” Acts 2: 1-3

Fire. Our sun is a ball of fire bringing both light and heat, necessary for life on earth. Volcanic eruptions and lightning strikes are awe-inspiring reminders of God, the Father of creation, and of natural forces we humans cannot always control.

Fire is a gift of which the Zoroastrians, the earliest known monotheists, were so aware that each householder kept a domestic fire burning continually throughout their lifetime, and to this day the Zoroastrians keep the eternal flame alive in their fire temples. We humans are the only earthly creatures able to make fire at will. Unfortunately, the gift is too often abused. For those caught up in the events of Hiroshima, Grenfell Tower, or the recently devastated Rohingya refugee camps, fire is not just awe-inspiring, it is terrifying.

These are not natural disasters; they are the result of human aggression, a search for quick profits, greed and exploitation which show no respect for life. The indigenous people living in the Amazon find that forest fires are started deliberately to clear land for mining and cultivation, thereby destroying important biodiversity and the habitats of those people.

Fire needs fuel. Climate disruption is the result of many factors but our use of fossil fuels is a major contributor. We now know about the damage done to our planet by using those fuels to power our industry, our transport and heating, but we are too slow to take decisive action to invest in sustainable fuel sources. Fire can also be used as a threat and a way to control others, sometimes in the name of religion. Those who did not conform were burnt at the stake, and more recently threatened with hellfire.

On the other hand, for those sitting around a family hearth, fire offers warmth, companionship and a safe space. We use it to cook, share food and tell stories. This is also what we do in our parish communities – we come together with candles, tell stories of Jesus the Son, and share His food and drink.

Humans have also learnt how to use fire to transform brittle material into something useful, as when the potter shapes clay, and then fires it to make pots which last. In the same way the Holy Spirit strengthens and inflames us so that we are empowered. After each Eucharist we are told “Go, the Mass is ended.” We must go out from there, our comfort zone, seeking out both the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor, the aggressors and the exploited, those at the centre and those on the margins, speaking in a language they will each understand.

Only when we come together as one human family will we be able to take the actions needed to reverse the effects of climate disruption, and start to live in harmony with our homeland, the planet earth, the gift of the creative Father.

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