



Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Introductory Prayer: Father, I place myself in your presence. I firmly believe in you and love you with all my heart. I entrust myself completely to your merciful but demanding ways, knowing that you only seek to lead me home to heaven.

Petition: Lord, help me to ignite awareness of your love all around me.

1. The Spark That Must Become a Blaze: Jesus' intensity and passion break out in radical expression in today's Gospel. He yearns for a divine conflagration in the hearts of his disciples. Jesus endured a true baptism of immersion, steeped in the pain of Golgotha, precisely so that our own baptism would not be a mere ceremony. Rather he wanted our baptism to be a holy spark of divine life that, with care and formation, would become a growing flame of authentic Christian holiness. Indeed, let us fan that flame and never allow external pressures, or our own mediocrity, to extinguish it.

2. Peace, at Any Price? Jesus corrects a misperception in some of his listeners. Some no doubt expected him to usher in the messianic peace, when the lion would lie down

with the lamb (see Isaiah 11:6-9). No, the time for that peace will be at history's end, when God's Kingdom is established in all its fullness. Till then, Christianity will often find itself in conflict with the powers of the world. We want to be considered nice people, yet our convictions will at times bring us conflict. May the spark of our soul be a strong-enough flame to accept those moments and avoid the cheap peace of acquiescing with the world.

3. Put Up Your Dukes? Should Catholics be people spoiling for a fight? Not if they want to be good Catholics! Those who love fighting and arguing may very well find themselves in divided households, but not for the reasons Jesus really means. Courtesy, gentleness, and the finer details of charity should characterize the person who wants to be like Christ. These kinds of people seek to unite, not divide. When they are dividers, it is because they have to be. They know when the point arrives that if they bend any further, they'll break—where flexibility would degenerate into infidelity. There are tough, sad moments when being faithful to Christ means a head-on collision in a very important relationship, such as the ones Jesus mentions. But when it's a question of where our first loyalty lies, there is no debate. Christ must come first.

Conversation with Christ: Lord, you are the center of my life. I thank you for my family and pray that I will never be a stumbling block for their faith. Give me the wisdom to know when to speak and when to remain silent. Help me, so that I will never compromise the Gospel, nor needlessly alienate those whom you have sent me to serve.

Resolution: I will strive to set a good spiritual example for my family and will invite someone who has strayed to consider coming back.