

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR C)

What: Richmond Theology on Tap: Catholic Trivia Night!

Where: Kitchen 64 (3336 N Boulevard)

When: ***NEW DATE***Monday October 7, 6:30-8:30. We ask guests to purchase food & drink by 7:15.

Join us for an evening of fun and test your Catholic knowledge! Our host will be Deacon Grimm from St. Bede Catholic Church in Williamsburg. While Theology on Tap is traditionally a young adult event, singles and married people of all faith backgrounds are welcome. Search "Richmond Theology on Tap" on Facebook to RSVP!

August 18, 2019

Jeremiah 38:4–6, 8–10 • Hebrews 12:1–4 • Luke 12:49–53

I.

I didn't hesitate when I was asked to name my favorite movie at a youth-group meeting in a previous parish.

“The Hunt for Red October” (1990).

It stars Alec Baldwin as the hero, CIA analyst Jack Ryan, and Sean Connery as Marko Ramius, captain of the Soviet nuclear submarine that seeks to defect to the United States.

The movie is based on Tom Clancy's first novel (1984).

(Interestingly, Tom Clancy wrote this bestseller while working in the insurance business.)

There's a scene in the movie I like very much.

Captain Ramius explains to his seniors officers—his co-conspirators—that he left a letter for the Soviet defense minister declaring his intention to defect.

Exasperated, the officers ask him why he would do such a thing, since much of the Soviet navy will now be hunting the *Red October* with reckless abandon.

In the movie, Ramius, calmly tells the officers, while eating a steak, the story of Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conquistador who took Mexico.

Upon landing in 1519, the first thing Cortés did was burn his ships—to motivate his crew.

Now, there could be no thought of returning to Spain.

The crew had no choice but to make things work.

II.

In other words, don't let anything get in the way of what must be done.

This is Jesus' message in the Gospel.

When he speaks about sowing division, this the point:
nothing can get in the way of his mission,
and therefore the mission of those who follow him:

“Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth?
No, I tell you, but rather division.”

Inevitably, some will choose to follow Christ while others will not.

There will be a division because the commitment of discipleship is radical.

The “baptism” that Jesus' speaks of is the goal of his mission:

“There is a baptism with which I must be baptized,
and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!”

“Baptism”—the term is Greek—means “immersion.”

In the context of today's Gospel,
it is a reference to Jesus' Passion, Death, and Resurrection—
what the Church calls the “Paschal Mystery.”

Jesus must undergo his suffering, Death, and Resurrection;
this is why the Father sent him into the world.

The “fire” is related to this “baptism,”
appearing in the prior sentence:

“I have come to set the earth on fire,
and how I wish it were already blazing!”

The “fire” is Christ’s love,
revealed, above all, in his Paschal Mystery.

That fire is painful, cleansing, and transformative.
Fire, as we know in everyday life, is both painful and purgative.

Painful if you touch it, but also cleansing.

Fire, for example, can be used to cleanse various items.

The love of Jesus Christ is like that:
it “burns away” our sins, our shortcomings so that we become more like him.

Christ is a fire that, if we touch it, will ultimately transform us.

It will transform us in the sense that we will become more truly ourselves,
the men and women God wants us to be.

Here I think of saying of St. Catherine of Sienna (1347–1380).

This remarkable laywoman was a spiritual master.

And she wasn’t afraid to even admonish the popes of her day.

Catherine declared:
“Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.”

In other words,
we can only be truly ourselves with God, because he made us.

The love of God—living in relationship with God—makes us who we are.

God doesn’t extinguish our identity.

Being holy doesn't mean being off-putting or no longer enjoying life, or not being well-rounded.

No, it's the opposite: all those things come alive.

The love of Christ burns away whatever would keep us away from God.

What remains attracts others.

Christ does not want anything to keep us from him, from fulfilling his will in our lives.

And he's there, to help us; his love empowers us.

So, he is a fire.

He is "dangerous," in the sense that a relationship with him will change us, but only for the better.

So, I offer three recommendations for experiencing the "fire" of his love.

1. Attend Mass each Sunday and holy day of obligation.
2. Spend quality time in prayer each day—at least five minutes
3. If you haven't been to confession in a while, receive the Sacrament of Penance
4. Think of one concrete way to be involved in the parish

III.

"Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith."

This week, in addition to the Assumption of Mary,

the Church celebrated the feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe.

This Franciscan priest willingly died in place of another man, whom he did not know, at Auschwitz (1942).

It was the culmination of his life, and the perfect expression of love for God: to be “baptized,” as it were, in the suffering of Jesus Christ.

To have become himself by living—and dying—like his Savior.