

Lord, may we *dare* to be
willing, and seeking, for
your fire to burn in us;
and for your word to
move into our depths.

For in you we find the joy
set before us, that is a
sign of the abundant life.
Amen.

Children love campfires.
Building them. Playing with
them a step or so beyond the
limits their parents set.
Staring into the flames and
coals. Cooking by them.
Roasting marshmallows, or
burning them, over the
flames. A campfire, well
built and contained in a fire
ring, is a lovely thing.

A fire in a house or woods is
another matter, a wild terror
like a flood or powerful
earthquake. Fire is power,
energy, a force that
consumes and changes things.
Harnessed for good, it cooks
or purifies. Gone wild, it
burns and destroys.

Our lord says to us this
morning, I came to bring
fire to the earth! I came
to bring fire to the earth.
And the Lord God says
through Jeremiah, Is not
my word like fire, and like
a hammer that breaks a
rock in pieces? That is a
pretty good hammer.

*Are we ready for the fire
Jesus sets to burn in us?*
Jesus is pretty insistent that

the relationship with God he is here to share with us has this *firey* aspect.

It will take our dross, our rough stuff, and purify and change it into something that shows the hidden beauty and potential.

This is supposed to be a little frightening and exciting.

Its not for the vague, or mild, or wishy-washy. Fire is fire. Sometimes we might prefer a warm bath, a cool breeze, or a even, pleasant smoke, but no fire.

I think the *firey* aspect of God's spirit at work in us is why Jesus speaks next about division.

If you aren't ready for fire, and are not part of the fire hosting enterprise, having a bunch of burning torches or embers flung in your midst is something you want to avoid. Its disruptive.

Now its important to reckon with the reality that not all fires are God's. Human meanness and immaturity fuels the poisonous consuming flame of discord and alienation so easily. And when followers of Christ burn with these all too human flames, God must be particularly disappointed and vexed.

Can we really become burning flame people of God's Holy Spirit? It doesn't seem, from outside of it, to be

clearly a campfire instead of a wildfire.

Christopher Hitchens has just written a whole book on the premise of the title, *God is not great*. That the religious impulse in people is inherently dangerous, violent, and deluded. Its only fire is human, irrational division and destruction, the fire of suicide bombers. Human genome scientist Francis Collins points out that atheistic regimes have tended to be at least as violent and abusive as any evil power.

Am I not a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Who can hide that I cannot see?

What has straw in common with wheat?

Both will burn. But the word of God, the fire of God, is that which burns with the passion of God's holiness, God's life, God's love. God's compassion and courage. Never the energy of opposition.

As seeds of good wheat, Christ would leaven us with the bread of life. That we might become, under God's flame, good bread- life for the world.

But can we control God's fire? Only negatively. We can avoid it, or try to set up barriers to it. Because it seems like a threat to our

orderly, calm sense of control.

Or we can resist it, and build our lives out of precisely the things that God's holiness finds petty, like so much dried brushwood, or even awful, like harming and hating and using other people, or the planet. These are the unholy things the fire of God wants to consume.

If we are going to embrace the fire of God, and invite it into us, we have to trust the fire-maker--the Holy Spirit.

We have to give ourselves to God. Not our reason, or any human institution, or other authority. We have to welcome the heat of the flame.

Maybe Jesus says harshly, you hypocrites, because we are tempted to want God to fulfill our hopes and fears, our wishful agenda, but to avoid the fire that purifies. We are scared of the consequences of this energy that wants to forge and fashion us anew as God's people. We've all been burned before, by other people, maybe even by religion or the church.

At our best, we are not that far outside. At our best, I think we are on the cusp of becoming more deeply, Spirit people- kindled with the flame of the Holy Spirit of God.

This summer I have looked at and listened to our music DVD and CD. The first section of it is from our glorious Pentecost service. Full of red banners, joy, people wearing red. Full of spirit-conveying musical expression. Full of people who are being touched and responsive to love.

St. Clare's celebrates as its founding feast the feast of Pentecost. And in our lives, we have been blessed with many good witnesses to faith and love and helpfulness. It is this cloud of witnesses that calls us into becoming something bigger than ourselves. Which requires us to move from my agenda and

my life, to being one of God's beloved, flame bearing, people being forged anew. Living by the Spirit.

By trusting God to bring out our beauty and promise, and take away what is trivial or inhibiting us from realizing our full promise as holy partners with God.

This is a time when the community of St. Clare's may become more full of flaming torches of the Holy Spirit.

It won't happen if we don't want and pray for it to.

All may, some should, none must.

But I can tell you, God is nudging us. What has straw in common with wheat? Says the Lord. Is not my word like fire? And Jesus says to us, I came to bring fire to the earth.

This fall, you could join one of the choirs. Or you could join a class like Alpha or Disciples. Or go on a Cursillo or Women's Retreat. God has many groups gathering around the Holy Spirit's fireplace.

You could work on the Habitat house, or the Haiti

Banquet, or teach church school or serve in youth ministry. Maybe the spark is calling you into one of those, or to make ready your own place for the fire to spread.

Whatever you do, welcoming the flame takes prayer and openness and love.

And it makes such lovely lights and sparks.

So come and play. Come and get renewed.

Pray for God to set our hearts on fire. Amen. 1147