THE NEW SHOFAR

Those who do not think about their own sins make up for it by thinking incessantly about the sins of others – C. S. Lewis

August 17th

Kingdom love is what the Spirit builds

The fire of which Luke speaks in today's gospel is the fire of divine love, the fire of the Holy Spirit. No one emerges unscathed, unchanged from such an encounter with the living God (think Moses). This fire is burning, purifying, transforming, overwhelming, energising and terrible. *Jesus said to his disciples: I have come to cast fire on the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!* What on earth does he mean?

Jesus very explicitly and deliberately rejected any use of violence or coercion in his mission. He did not form his followers into an army or lead them in war. An ardent and faithful follower of Jesus could never be led to commit acts of terrorism, to murder the innocent, or to imagine that suicide might be rewarded with special favours in paradise (the Crusades stand as an example of Christianity gone wrong). Someone ablaze with the fire of Christ will love, not attack his enemies. He will be endlessly patient, forgiving, compassionate. He will always create around him peace, joy, hope, reconciliation, mercy, goodness. God's fire is a more radical kind.

Love's Fire will always bring God's light to the world

But Jesus did come to bring fire. He did not die to offer us bland moral platitudes, or to console us with mere sentimental piety, or to promote peace at any price. Jesus demands the entirety of our lives, and it remains true that his fire can be terrifying, powerful, destructive. It turns life upside down. If allowed to blaze out of control, it will convert what it consumes into itself. This divine fire, descending from heaven, is not passive, but active. It will drive its victims out of themselves. They will become great missionaries, heroic martyrs, outstanding preachers, profound scholars, holy contemplatives, founders of religious Orders. By the driving power of this fire, great charitable movements will be launched, and will spread, and will be a shining light amid the darkness of the world. The darkness of disbelief, or false religion, or pagan superstition, will be swept away, and the truth of the Gospel will shine out. Ordinary people, like monks, or the married, or the sick, whose vocation is not to do anything extraordinary, will nevertheless rise, within the circumstances of their lives, to acts of outstanding love, or generosity, or patience, or forgiveness. Their lives will give great glory to God. And their prayer of intercession will be a powerful force for good, for blessing, for salvation, in the world. They inspire us with their sacrifices.

The fire of Jesus burns, at least potentially, within each of us. It is our secret, of which the secular world has no understanding, or conception. This fire within us opens up our lives to visions of eternity. The dominant reality of our lives is not

what you see; not the unexciting routines by which we live, but the living presence of the Holy Trinity working within to conform our lives to theirs: infinite love; absolute goodness; divine life. Externally we appear quite unremarkable, we nevertheless live in communion with the fiery Seraphim who veil their faces before the holiness of God and cry out unceasingly in ecstatic adoration (as in the Book of Revelation). Touched by this same divine fire, each of us is - should be - set alight by its contagious holiness, made to shine with its glory, so as to become ever more truly what we already are: God's own beloved sons and daughters in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Faithful Christian living will always threaten the world.

Divisions at every level of the human community will always be a part of the world where the Gospel is fully and truly lived. We are called to be the stone in society's shoe. The more we imitate Christ the more we will find ourselves in conflict with the ways of the world. There can be no compromises with false narratives. While the world tolerates lies – men can be women; there are many truths with no single truth to guide us; only white people can be racist; all institutions must be torn down; abortion is a woman's right; children can choose their gender; white privilege; the falsehood of DEI - diversity, equality and inclusion, Black lives matter, "taking the knee" and hundreds more. In stark contrast, the Kingdom of God calls us to stand for the Truth of the Kingdom of God, whatever the cost. Families will be divided, communities challenged, and faithful Christians struck down, marginalised, penalised and some called to face their Golgotha moments. It is so much easier to just go along with the reigning philosophy of the day, to keep quiet or to explore ways in which we can introduce them into the message of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. This is not the fire of which Jesus speaks. To be a follower of Christ is to be spiritual arsonist, setting our world ablaze with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's fire sets us ablaze with love for God. The Holy Spirit gives us a love of God that is intense and all consuming. It is the love which empowered Jesus to hand his life over for our salvation. It is the love that compelled the apostles to witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the love which today inspires people to leave their comfortable lives to serve the needy. If we are feeling dead inside, we need to give our hearts over to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. We will find that our hearts are so engulfed with God and His love that there will not be enough hours in the day to proclaim His wonders and sing His praises.

God's saving work is not finished with the cross and resurrection. Rather He invites us to enter into the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection by making our lives an offering to Him. He desires that each of us also share in the joy of bringing His saving word to others. The gift of the Holy Spirit which has forever marked us as God's sons and daughters empowers us to do just that. He is continually at work within us to transform us, purify us and set us on fire with love. It is ours for the asking.