

Opening the Word: The Great Conflagration



Over the last few years, we've looked closely at God's mercy. In this column itself, it has been noted that in Latin, God's mercy, *misericordia*, is the movement of the divine heart, the *pathos* of the triune God for the human condition. God has come to dwell among us, and now through the mystery of the Church, the Word made flesh invites all human beings to partake in this communion of love.

Nonetheless, such mercy demands on the part of us human beings a response of love. Divine mercy is not like weak parenting, where mom or dad are simply too weak to educate the child. It's not akin to a leisurely tolerance, where God becomes a character in "The Big Lebowski" – "the divine Dude abides."

[Nov. 17 – Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time](#)

Mal 3:19-20
Ps 98:5-6, 7-8, 9
2 Thes 3:7-12
Lk 21:5-19

Every human being will need to decide if they desire God as much as God desires each person. Are we willing to live as disciples of the living God rather than idolaters of the powers of the present age, only mildly remembering our identity as beloved daughters and sons of God?

Jesus describes this moment of decision. The disciple should not expect that commitment to the kingdom of God is an invitation into high society.

At the end of time, there will be wars. There will be violence. The lust for domination that often characterizes human behavior will seem to conquer divine love.

The disciple must come face to face with this lust for domination. There's no easy way out. Love unto the end, divine charity, will be rejected by all those who operate according to this lust for domination. The disciple will experience this rejection through violence enacted against his or her being.

In a death-dealing age, this is how violence functions. The Church's teaching provides a resource not for avoiding this death-dealing age, but for facing it head-on. Love unto the end is meant to be experienced by the unborn, the migrant, the prisoner sentenced unto death. Human dignity is not a category revealed exclusively through the Scriptures but written into the very fabric of creation. We stand in solidarity with those who suffer abuses against this dignity because that's what a disciple does. And there's often a cost.

We should not be naive. This lust for domination is not found exterior to the Church. In the very hierarchy, as we've painfully learned over the last 15 years in the United States, it's often the case that bishops, priests and lay leaders were more interested in the pursuit of power than love unto the end – than protecting those who were most vulnerable.

For Jesus, the disciple who loves unto the end will experience the violence of the present age. There will be hatred. There will be a handing over of the disciple to the powers that be. But there will not be ultimate death. There will be resurrection.

It's time for all of us to decide whether we seek to be disciples of the living God. Since Our Lord rose from the dead, gave the keys of the kingdom to the apostles, it's always been the time.

But now more than ever, the time is at hand. It's time for

ecclesial leaders, ordained and lay alike, to give up on the power politics of bureaucracy and instead abide by the love of the Word made flesh. It's time for local parishes to preach the Good News that Jesus is Lord, no matter the cost.

There is mercy in this invitation, because there's still time.

But as every human being learns, as they approach the end of their lives, time is not limited.

Now is the acceptable time for friendship with Our Lord.

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