

Wednesday of the 10th Week in Ordinary Time

Homily of Bishop Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

June 8, 2022

The 18th Chapter of the first Book of Kings shows Elijah preparing the sacrifice of a bull and calling down fire upon the sacrifice. The people fall prostrate and proclaim, “The Lord is God! The Lord is God!”

Our Epiclesis prayers within our Eucharistic Prayers in the Catholic Mass call down the Fire of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI analyzes the Epiclesis of the Eucharistic Prayers: “Thus it is through the working of the Spirit that Christ himself continues to be present and active in his Church, starting with her vital center which is the Eucharist. Against this backdrop we can understand the decisive role played by the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic celebration, particularly with regard to transubstantiation... Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, in his *Catecheses*, states that we ‘call upon God in his mercy to send his Holy Spirit upon the offerings before us, to transform the bread into the body of Christ and the wine into the blood of Christ. Whatever the Holy Spirit touches is sanctified and completely transformed.’ Saint John Chrysostom too notes that the priest invokes the Holy Spirit when he celebrates the sacrifice: like Elijah, the minister calls down the Holy Spirit so that ‘as grace comes down upon the victim, the souls of all are thereby inflamed.’”(12-13)

To trace that short reference to Elijah by St. John Chrysostom to its full context in the first Book of Kings that we just heard illumines how a Catholic priest on fire ontologically with his consecration and mission as a priest, on fire with *holiness and mission*, on fire with unity of life and pastoral charity, on fire with the New Evangelization calls down, like Elijah who would go to heaven on a fiery chariot, the Fire of the Holy Spirit on the gifts of bread and wine.

In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope St. John Paul II quotes St. Ephrem: “He called the bread his living body and he filled it with himself and his Spirit...He who eats it

with faith, eats Fire and Spirit. Take and eat this, all of you, and eat with it the Holy Spirit. For it is truly my body and whoever eats it will have eternal life.” (17)

The closing prayer to the Mass for the Priest on the Anniversary of His Ordination says it well: “For the glory of your name, O Lord, I have joyfully celebrated the mystery of faith to mark the anniversary of my priestly ordination, so that I may be in truth what I have handled mystically in this sacrifice...(repeat) *so that I may be in truth what I have handled mystically.*”

In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* 14, Pope Benedict XVI speaks of “sacramental mysticism.” The phrase may sound lofty or somewhat unattainable but it is what a Bishop, his presbyterate and the entire People of God are called to together.

When the Bishop, as a Successor of the Apostles and in union with Peter, the Apostles, the college of Bishops and his priests, calls down Fire, the priests, deacons and people of God are drawn together in communion and mission.

When holy priests, in union with Peter, the Apostles, the college of Bishops, their own Bishop and the presbyterate, call down Fire, our parishes in union with the Bishop discern how “to cast fire on the earth” in the New Evangelization.

In this month of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I look forward to ordaining to the Catholic priesthood on Saturday, June 18th, Deacons Louis Cona, Chris Heller and Stephen Rooney.

Please pray for them and pray for a rich harvest of vocations to the priesthood on Long Island and throughout the universal Church.