

### Third Sunday of Lent – 2025 C

Why a burning bush? Scripture represents God seated on a high and lofty throne, surrounded by a countless host of angels. Artworks depict an older but vigorous crowned King with flowing white hair and beard to suggest eternity and larger-than-life stature to indicate infinite power. But only here, when God reveals his name and speaks personally to Moses, is the Divine manifest in a shrub on fire. Why a burning bush?

Fire has long been a symbol of the presence of the divine. When Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the Lord came down in fire. The Israelites were guided during their exodus by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When the Spirit came down on the Apostles at Pentecost, His presence was seen as tongues of flame. In a few weeks, we will light and bless the new fire at the Easter vigil and light individual candles from the Paschal candle, the flame passed on to show that we share in this light of the risen Christ by His Spirit living within us. We continue to mark the Presence of Jesus in the tabernacle with the flame of the candle burning nearby.

But why fire? Fire was used to purify gold and silver, burning away the dross so the precious metal is obtained without lesser matter mingled in. Fire gives light to see, heat to warm, flames to clear the land so it can be cultivated and prepare the food it grows. We might have matches or a lighter in a pocket or purse, but we can't carry live fire, hold it or touch it. But we do feel its effects. Stare at the fire, and it is always moving yet always the same ... predictable but unpredictable at the same time. And fire can be dangerous, a possibly destructive force we must approach with respect and attention to use it well.

All of this Moses knew about fire. But in the burning bush, Moses encountered not a blind force of nature like the flames of a shepherd's campfire, but a Personal Presence speaking with a voice he could understand. You'll note that God gives two answers to Moses's question about his name. God is I AM

WHO AM, a title that sounds abstract, metaphysical. But He is also the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the divine Who is part of their history and heritage, God who is close to them in their need. Both are true ... for only the truly great can be humble enough to become small; only the eternal Word can speak directly and equally in every time and place – always the same yet ever new. This holy fire will clear the way, purify them, guide and sustain them in whatever they need to live as His people.

All of this foreshadows the mission of Jesus. He has become small, taking on our own humanity to offer it in sacrifice on the Cross. He gives us the light of faith to see what human vision alone cannot; He brings warmth when love grows cold and we are discouraged; He gives whatever we need to see us through to the life with God that has no end. His mercy purifies us from the things not worthy of a child of God that enter our lives by habit or desire or selfishness or greed. He burns away from our spirits what holds us captive in the past. His love is ever ancient, but ever new. We cannot control this holy fire, but we feel its effects: love that is patient, ever kind and merciful, never exhausted or diminished, infinite and unchanging.

Today, as you come to Communion, take a look at the tabernacle light always aflame, and hear Jesus's patient call to conversion and bring to Him whatever holds you captive – habits, attitudes, hurts, resentments, fears, doubts. Like Moses we stand on holy ground in the presence of God among us, humble yet all-powerful. We contemplate today the inexhaustible love shown for us on the Cross – the burning bush now fully grown, the Tree of Calvary aflame with the living and unfailing mercy of God.