

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Stir into Flame Sts. Timothy and Titus Memorial Friday, January 26, 2018 8:15 AM
2 Tm 1:1-8; Lk 10:1-9 (Relationships have to be nurtured the way a fire has to be nurtured.

“For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands.”

We are talking here about **Timothy, who was one of the early pastors of the Church** after the time of the apostles. They were called presbyter-bishops; they were assisted by deacons. In time the office of **presbyter-bishop** was split into two different ranks, bishop and then presbyter, so that they could have more and more presbyters to meet the needs of more and more people as the Church grew.

Now St. Paul is writing to him and he is saying, “I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands.” Now scholars dispute whether the **imposition of hands** is referring to what we call the sacrament of Confirmation or what we call the sacrament of Holy Orders. The fact is it may not have been clearly distinguished at that time. It was the imposition of hands and it was **a calling down the power of the Holy Spirit.**

But the point that the author is making is that just because we have received a gift does not mean that we now can sit back and simply thrive. He says, “I remind you to stir into flame.” The **gift of God is fire**, true; but fires can go out. And in many people having received the fire of God’s love, it does go out, sad to say. We might even say **it’s inevitable that it will go out unless it is stirred into flame.** As you know from your experiences of camping, there’s a point where a fire gets very low; in fact it isn’t actually burning anymore, but there are still coals. And if you want to add a log and blow on it, you will get a flame again.

Well in a very similar way **our faith is a gift from God and it comes with the gift of hope and the gift of love, without which of course faith is useless.** Now that love is a fire of a kind.

But it is also a relationship. **Relationships have to be nurtured the way a fire has to be nurtured.** You don't put any more fuel in the fire, there is no more fire. You don't put any fuel into a relationship, there is no more relationship; it has to be fed.

Now **God feeds us with the Holy Eucharist.** God sustains us, **but what do we do?** After all, **a relationship is two-way.** How do we feed? How do we stir into flame the relationship we have with God. There is something there for us to do. **And the greatest mistake anyone can make is to think that we are merely passive recipients of the gifts of God.** That you will not find indicated in the New Testament, never. There is no passive reception, but **there is an active reception and a willing cooperation with the gifts of God,** a working with the gifts of God. For example, St. Thomas says that **in Baptism and in Confirmation we receive infused virtues.** What is a virtue? A virtue is a habit; it's a good habit; it's a good moral habit. Well that's good; that's a wonderful thing. **But a habit is useless if you don't exercise it.** It's just like playing the piano. The greatest pianists practice every day, as with all great musicians. They practice every day because a habit has to be constantly practiced. So it is with the gifts we receive from God. **They have to be constantly practiced,** or we might as well not have them.