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"There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished" (Luke 12:50).

Rom 6:19-23; Luke 12:49-53

In today's Gospel, Jesus describes the Good News as a revolution requiring a "baptism of fire" he and his followers would have to undergo to begin the transformation of human history. Another image he often used was that of childbirth. The world was pregnant with God's Will, and only in anguish and pain would a new creation be born. Powerful forces were being marshaled against him and the conversion he preached. The status quo of money and power, tribal and family loyalty, religious control and imperial designs masking Satanic resistance were at work deep within the culture.

Luke's Gospel describes the generational divide and family conflicts that had opened up as the fledgling church drew converts from Jewish enclaves and from the Gentile world. Parents disowned their own children, conservatives blamed the new radicals for disrupting the community and destroying traditional values. The followers of Jesus were heretics who brought Roman persecution. St. Paul was demonized for dividing the Jerusalem church and undermining Law of Moses. Diversity was polluting the purity of blood within the First Covenant community. For some, the rise of the church signaled the end of the world.

Our baptism into Christ must go beyond ritual to the reality of embracing a unique perspective and total commitment to "put on Christ" that changes us from the inside

out. Radical discipleship is redundant. Every baptized person is a radically new creation, like leaven permeating society and culture from within, quietly but steadily advancing the values Jesus taught and lived. This is the essence of evangelization. The Holy Spirit is the new life that invites us to take a deep breath and go forward each day. Our baptism of fire and rebirth in hope must be a daily experience, undertaken with courage and faith.

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