

Dear Brothers and Sisters



*"Moses was tending the flock of his father in law, Jethro. Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God.*

*There the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though consumed by fire, was not consumed." Exodus 3:1-3*

On a retreat at Geneseo Monastery in NY State, I once found a book called "The Burning Bush" by Lev Gillet, a Monk of the Orthodox Church. He wrote a commentary on Moses and the Burning Bush, which is the first reading in Mass today. His words resonated with me, so I would like to paraphrase them here for us all.

Horeb may geographically be regarded as part of Mount Sinai. But historically and spiritually Horeb and Sinai signify very different things. One is the mountain where Moses saw the Burning Bush, the other the mountain where he received the Commandments – the Tablets of the Law.

If God's people had been able to live by according to the vision of the Burning Bush, they would not have needed the Tablets of the Law. But for those who remained untouched by the revelation of Horeb the revelation of Sinai was necessary. Whenever the interior flame is lacking, there have to be commandments written on tablets of stone. This truth is as valid for us today as it was for the people in the Old Testament.

It was not uncommon for Moses to see a bush caught alight in the desert. Lightning could easily strike and ignite shrubs during desert storms. But this bush was different, he stopped and watched for 5, 10, 20, 40 minutes; an hour, an hour and a half... it kept on burning without being consumed. Moses decided 'I must go over to look at this remarkable sight.'

All this applies just as much today as it did to Moses. If during the course of our lives we hurry along without stopping, without even a glance to the Burning Bush (which nevertheless continues its blazing along the whole of our way, though most of the time our eyes are closed to it), we shall miss the opportunity God desires. If, on the contrary, we do not hesitate to leave aside the flocks of Jethro –our daily cares- the Lord will call to us from the midst of the Bush. He will call to each of us by a name that is our own.

We are invited every day to contemplate the Burning Bush in our life, and to turn aside from our daily cares to experience what God is doing. What Moses saw being burnt was not a fine tree, thick with foliage and fruit; not a beautiful plant covered with flowers, fragrant with scent. It was a bush, in other words a wild plant lacking in beauty, a stunted shrub, with thorns, a type of weed.

Noxious weeds represent the soul abandoned to sin. The divine fire purifies without destroying. It is imperative to throw into this fire our dead wood, our thorns, our weeds. The Burning Bush is a symbol of purification.

Jesus invites us to repentance in the Gospel today. This repentance means throwing our weeds –pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth- into the fire of God's purifying love. Then, and only then, can we be surprised that we are not consumed but rather purified by the fire of His love within us.

Fr. Sean