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“Warm the chill” – Fighting Lukewarmness (Part 1)

“...Bend the stubborn heart and will; Melt the frozen, warm the chill; Guide the steps that go astray...”

These words come to us from the sequence sung or read at mass on Pentecost Sunday which begins with simple, and powerful, invocation: **“Come, Holy Spirit, come!”** Last week we considered something of the spiritual malaise that grips the hearts of many Catholic Christians today, both those who practice and do not. Multiple causes may be cited for the crisis of faith that many experience today. One such malaise that can fly under the radar, is what some spiritual authors call **“lukewarmness.”** What’s that?

In the Book of Revelation, the Lord complains of a change in the hearts of the faithful in the city of Laodicea, **“I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”**¹ To understand where our Lord is coming from we need only consider a more everyday experience. Hot coffee or iced coffee? One or the other, for me. If the pot of coffee has been sitting for a few hours unattended, it’s not unlikely that I will spit it out after a taste.

What does a lukewarm soul look like? One spiritual writer describes it in this manner. He writes:

“The soul feels tired of love. It experiences a proliferation of material compensations, a sensation of emptiness and sadness, irritability about trivialities, a tendency to talk too much, to say negative things or make fun of people, and voluntary distractions in vocal prayers. This disease, radically opposed to love of God, is a source of unhappiness while joy and peace lead to union with him.”²

Joy and peace are fruits of love; the divine love for which we were created. As the old Baltimore Catechism answers the question: **“God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next.”**³ If that is what we were made for, why do we settle for “cheap thrills” when a banquet is opened up to us each Sunday?

St. Augustine describes what happens in our souls like this, writing in the midst of his own conversion:

“...when the joys of eternity call us from above, and pleasure in temporal prosperity holds us fast below, our one soul is in no state to embrace either with its entire will. Claimed by the truth for the one, to the other clamped by custom, the soul is torn apart in its distress.”⁴

¹ Revelation 3:15-16

² Fernandez-Carvajal, Francis. *Overcoming Lukewarmness: Healing Your Soul's Sadness*. Scepter Publishers. Kindle Edition.

³ Baltimore Catechism, Lesson 1, Question 6: *“Why did God make you?”*

⁴ St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions - Ignatius Critical Editions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012) p. 220.

Next week, we will look at a battle plan for helping heal this spiritual sickness. Wherever we may be a great place to begin is with that simple prayer, ***“Come, Holy Spirit.”*** Most importantly, ask the Lord to: ***“...bend the stubborn heart and will; Melt the frozen, warm the chill; Guide the steps that go astray...”*** As we read in the Gospel of Luke:

“If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?”⁵

~Fr. Matthew Biedrzycki

⁵ Luke 11:13