

Sociologists say that the deepest primal urge in human beings is for fire and water, food and shelter. This makes sense to me because even when I was an avid outdoorsman learning survival training, survival centered around finding fire and water, food and shelter. Without those things you would eventually die, but with them you would live.

I was reflecting on these basic human needs in light of this evening's vigil and was not surprised to find them at the core of today's celebration. Think back to how this service begins, with us huddled together outside around a fire before processing into the shelter of our church which was brightened by our flames. Soon, we will gather together once again around a fountain of water before journeying to the altar where we are nourished by our communal meal. Fire and water, food and shelter. Even on the natural level, this liturgy is designed to meet our deepest human needs.

Of course, we know that these things only serve as symbols of the much deeper mysteries that they express. In our first reading from Genesis, we are told that God created the light, separating it from the darkness. He then created the waters before separating them from the land which He made teeming with life. Fire and water and food, all gifts to us from our loving God.

Our readings go on to tell us that God called Abraham to follow Him, making of Abraham a family of many nations. They eventually fell into slavery in Egypt until God sent Moses to lead them out of slavery into freedom through the waters of the Red Sea as they were guided by a column of fire. As God led them through the desert, He gave them bread from heaven and water from the rock until the day they arrived in their new homeland which was teeming with milk and honey. As God said through the prophet Isaiah, "All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk!" Once again, we see fire and water, food and shelter.

Yet, our God had an even greater plan for us. He sent His Son among us, the true light of the world, so that His truth might scatter the darkness that imprisoned us. His Son sanctified the waters of the Jordan, so that we too might pass through the waters and be reborn into eternal life. When meeting the woman at the well, Jesus offered us living water which will quench our thirst for eternity. He did not stop there, but went on to sacrifice Himself for us on the Cross so that we might receive His Body and Blood, the true food from Heaven that will nourish us into eternal life. He promised to send the fire of the Holy Spirit upon us after He ascended to His Father so that we might be purified and made holy. At Pentecost, the gifts of the Holy Spirit did indeed come upon us, unifying us into one community of faith, a Church who shelters us from the storms of the world. Fire and water, food and shelter.

From the beginning of time, God wrote these desires into our very souls. He designed it so that we would need them on the natural level to preserve our lives, all the while nurturing a desire in our hearts to receive these gifts in a way that would never cease. A desire that can only be fulfilled supernaturally through the waters of baptism and the fire of the Holy Spirit, through the food of the Eucharist and the shelter of the eternal communion of the Saints. Without these gifts we will eventually die, but with them we will be preserved into eternal life.