

The Living Flame

Romans 5:5 · Acts 2:1-4 · Song of Songs 8:6-7

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the fire of Sinai and Pentecost is the Holy Spirit's love poured into ordinary hearts, and completes the study's water imagery as St. John of the Cross's living flame: Thread B resolves.

Catholic Touchstone. The Holy Spirit as fire and love (CCC 696; CCC 733-736): fire symbolizes the transforming energy of the Spirit's actions, and the first gift of the Spirit is love poured into our hearts.

What You Need to Know

Tonight Thread B resolves: the water becomes flame. Open by naming it plainly: since Session 5 the study has followed water out of the desert (the struck rock, the well, the four waters, the rain into the river), and tonight the Bible's own imagery makes its final move: what the Spirit is as water (life welling up), the Spirit is also as fire (love transforming). Same Gift, hotter picture. Song 8:6 even hands us the hinge in one verse: love's flashes are flashes of fire, and many waters cannot quench it.

The session's Carmelite centerpiece is St. John's last great poem, *The Living Flame of Love*: "O living flame of love that tenderly wounds my soul in its deepest center!" In his commentary John identifies the flame outright: the flame is the Holy Spirit, and the soul far advanced in union feels the Spirit's action no longer as the purging darkness of the night but as fire that wounds only to heal, burns only to transfigure. Connect it backward for the group: the same inflow of God that Session 6 called darkness is here experienced as light and warmth; the fire never changed, the wood did. John's own image: the log first sputters, blackens, and weeps out its moisture, and at last catches and becomes flame itself.

Romans 5:5 is the doctrinal anchor and should be memorized tonight: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Every load-bearing word: poured (abundance, not trickle), into our hearts (interior, Session 3's address), has been given (perfect tense; an accomplished bestowal, given in baptism and strengthened and completed in confirmation, CCC 1265, 1302-1303). The mystical fire is not a second-tier endowment awaiting the elite; it is given to every baptized life, to be kept alive in grace, fed, and fanned, and to be returned to through confession wherever mortal sin has quenched it.

Expect tonight's steelman from experience-hungry directions: if the fire is real, where are the manifestations? Handle it with both hands: real openness to the Spirit's freedom (this parish's charismatic members are allies, not opponents), and the Carmelite discernment that the surest evidence of fire is charity, not phenomena. Teresa, who received extraordinary experiences she never asked for, and Thérèse, who was not known for them, teach the same test.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

God introduces himself in fire: the bush that burns unconsumed (Exodus 3:2), the pillar of fire by night (13:21), Sinai wrapped in smoke "because the LORD descended upon it in fire" (19:18), and the fire that falls on Elijah's drenched sacrifice at Carmel (1 Kings 18:38), the very mountain whose name the Carmelites carry. Fire is theophany: God present, holy, and transforming what he touches.

The prophets internalize it: Jeremiah cannot hold it in: "there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones" (20:9); Malachi promises the Lord's coming "like a refiner's fire" to purify (3:2-3). And the Baptist stands on the threshold: "he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11).

Pentecost fulfills the trajectory: "And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them" (Acts 2:3). Sinai's one mountain-fire becomes a flame per person; the theophany takes up

residence. Note the direction the fire immediately moves: out the door, into the streets, in every language (2:4-11). Biblical fire always spreads.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John of the Cross

"O living flame of love that tenderly wounds my soul in its deepest center!" In his commentary John says plainly that this flame of love is the Spirit of its Bridegroom, the Holy Spirit, whom the soul feels within itself as a fire that burns and flares, bathing the soul in glory. And he explains the whole journey in one image: the same fire that first made the log smoke, blacken, and weep out its moisture (the nights of Sessions 5 and 6) at last sets it aflame, so that the wood does what fire does. The darkness and the flame were always one love at two stages of its work.

The Living Flame of Love, stanza 1 and his commentary on it.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Teresa of Avila

Teresa describes the famous grace called the transverberation: she saw, in vision, an angel with a small golden dart tipped as if with fire, which he plunged repeatedly into her heart, leaving her wholly on fire with great love of God; the pain was severe, she says, and so was the sweetness, and she could not wish to be rid of it. She is careful, in this chapter and in her later counsels on such favors, to insist, in substance, that they are God's to give, prove nothing by themselves, and matter for the love and humility they leave behind. The wound she prized was the love.

The Life, ch. 29.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Searching Scripture for her place in the Church, Thérèse found it in 1 Corinthians 12-13: since the Church is a body, it must have a heart, and that heart must be burning with love. "In the heart of the Church, my mother, I shall be love," she wrote, and so, she said, she would be everything. A cloistered woman not known for extraordinary phenomena (though her writings record their own quiet graces), dead at twenty-four, she is proof of tonight's test: the fire's evidence is charity. The Church, agreeing, put her sentence in the Catechism and made her a Doctor of the Church.

Story of a Soul, Manuscript B; quoted in CCC 826.

Catechism Connection

CCC 696 gathers the fire texts (Elijah, the Baptist's promise, the tongues of Pentecost) and states the symbol's meaning: fire symbolizes the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit's actions. It closes with a command worth reading aloud from 1 Thessalonians 5:19: Do not quench the Spirit.

CCC 733-735 give the order of gifts: God's love "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5 verbatim); this love is the first gift, containing all others, and by the Spirit's power we are given back the divine likeness lost through sin. The flame is not decoration on salvation; it is salvation catching.

CCC 2011 seals the session with Thérèse's act of offering quoted at length: the charity of Christ is the source in us of all our merits; in the evening of this life she will appear before God with empty hands, asking to receive from his love the eternal possession of himself. Empty hands (Session 2) filled with fire (tonight): the study's whole arc in one prayer.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Thread B ("Water to Flame") RESOLVES tonight. Land it explicitly in the discovery debrief and again at

close: the desert produced water (S5-S7), the water was the Spirit (S7), the rain became the river (S9), and Song 8:7's many-waters verse plus Acts 2 complete it: the Gift is one; water was his life in us, fire is his love through us. Say the sentence: the water was always on its way to flame.

Thread A: final restraint. Next session pays it in full; tonight you may say only: next week, the tailor, the whole story.

Liturgical note if timing allows: this session sits well with a votive candle lit at the opening prayer and extinguished only after the closing prayer; small, wordless, remembered.

Session Goals

1. Trace fire as theophany from the bush and Sinai to the tongues of Pentecost: one flame per person, moving outward.
2. Anchor the doctrine in Romans 5:5: the fire is love, already poured, already given.
3. Resolve Thread B: one Spirit, water and flame, life received becoming love bestowed.
4. Answer the manifestation objection with the Carmelite test: charity as the fire's evidence.

Time note (75-90 min). Win 10 min; Build 50 min; Send and Live It 15 min. If pressed, shorten Q2 (prophets) to a leader read-aloud; the Pentecost discovery, Romans 5:5 work, and steelman are the session's spine.

The Living Flame

Romans 5:5 · Acts 2:1-4 · Song of Songs 8:6-7

Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Father, what you poured into us at baptism, fan into flame tonight. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN

W1. Fire in your experience: hearth, bonfire, wildfire, pilot light, embers? Which one best describes your faith right now, and why?

W2. Have you ever watched love visibly change someone (a new parent, a convert, someone in love)? What did the change look like from outside?

BUILD

Q1. Read Romans 5:5 together and weigh every phrase: what has been poured, where, through whom, and when (note the tense)? What does this verse say is already true of every baptized person in this room?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." What: God's own love (subjective and objective at once: his love for us, and the capacity to love with his love). Where: into our hearts, the inner room of Session 3. Through whom: the Spirit himself; the Gift is a Person, not a substance. When: has been poured, has been given: perfect tense, an accomplished bestowal (Paul ties it to baptism and the Spirit throughout Romans 5-8). The astonishing conclusion: the fire the mystics describe is not reserved for the room's spiritual elite; it is truly given in baptism, to be welcomed, kept alive in grace, and returned to whenever sin has smothered it. Do not quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19) presumes a fire really given, and warns that we can smother it.

DISCOVERY MOMENT · Q2

Read Acts 2:1-4: wind, tongues as of fire on each one, and speech in every language. This scene is built from Old Testament fire. Send the group hunting: where did God first speak from a fire that did not consume (early Exodus)? Where did fire and smoke cover a mountain when God came down to make a covenant (Exodus again, at the giving of the Law)? Where did fire fall from heaven on a mountain called Carmel (the Elijah stories)? Build the chain, then ask what changed at Pentecost: where does the fire land now, and what does it immediately do?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The chain: the burning bush, fire that reveals the Name without consuming (Exodus 3:2-6); Sinai, "the LORD descended upon it in fire" as the covenant is given (19:18), while the people keep their distance; Carmel, fire falls on Elijah's drenched altar and the people fall on their faces (1 Kings 18:38-39). At Pentecost the same theophanic fire divides and rests "on each one of them" (Acts 2:3): the mountain's fire becomes personal, one flame per disciple, and no one keeps distance because the fire has come inside. What it immediately does: opens mouths; their Spirit-given speech draws the multitude, and every nation hears (2:4-11). Note for Thread B: at Carmel the fire consumed even the water in the trench; at Pentecost

the promised living water of John 7:39 arrives as flame. One Gift under the Church's two symbols (CCC 694, 696): water his life in us, fire his love through us. Reading them together is this study's proposal, and the tradition's warrant for it: the water was always on its way to flame.

Q3. Read Song of Songs 8:6-7. What does the Song claim about love's strength, its flame, and water's power over it? Set this beside the study's whole water-and-fire journey: what is the Song telling us about the love we have been tracing?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Set me as a seal upon your heart... for love is strong as death... Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it" (8:6-7). Claims: love is as unyielding as death itself; its nature is fire; and no flood can put it out (some ancient readers heard in "a most vehement flame" a flame of the LORD, the Song's one flicker of the divine Name). Against our journey: the deserts could not kill this love, the many waters of Session 6's darkness could not drown it, and the water imagery itself now hands over to the Song's own metaphor of consummation: fire. The love that sought us in the garden (Session 8) is not a mood; it is the strongest force the Song knows, and Romans 5:5 says it has been poured into us.

BUILD, THEN PRESS: IF THE FIRE IS REAL, WHERE ARE THE FLAMES?

Full strength, from a sincere charismatic voice: "Read Acts honestly: when the Spirit's fire falls, things visibly happen: tongues, prophecy, boldness, healings, about three thousand souls added in a single day, and that day begun by nine in the morning (Acts 2:15, 41). Paul says earnestly desire the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:1) and forbids forbidding tongues (14:39). But this Carmelite version domesticates the inferno into something invisible: a quiet interior glow, conveniently immune to evidence. If the same Spirit lives in this parish, why does it look nothing like Acts 2? Perhaps the mystics' silent flame is a consolation prize for churches that no longer expect power. I will believe the fire when I see it burn something."

Do not let the group dismiss this as mere enthusiasm; it has Acts on its side and names a real complacency.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Receive its rebuke first, because part of it lands: the Spirit does act visibly, the charisms are real and contemporary, Paul says desire them, and a parish that expects nothing of the Spirit will not be embarrassed by receiving it. Catholics affirm all of this (CCC 799-801 on charisms); the charismatic renewal sits inside the Church, not outside it. But the objection's test (visible phenomena as the fire's proof) is corrected by the same Paul it quotes, in the very passage it comes from: tongues without love are noise, prophecy and mountain-moving faith without love are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-2); the greatest evidence, greater than any gift, is the love of chapter 13, and the fruit of the Spirit begins with it (Galatians 5:22). Jesus's own criterion is the same: by their fruits, not their fireworks (Matthew 7:16, 21-23, where wonder-workers are turned away). Even in the Old Testament the lesson was staged: after Carmel's spectacular fire, God schooled Elijah at Horeb with wind, earthquake, and fire he was not in, and then the still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-12). The Carmelite fire is not smaller than the charismatic fire; it is the same fire measured at its source: charity. Teresa received phenomena and discounted them as evidence; Thérèse received none and blazed hot enough to be named a Doctor of the Church. So: desire the gifts, welcome the Spirit's freedom, and let the parish expect more, and test every flame the apostolic way: does it burn into love? That fire, when it is real, is never actually invisible: ask anyone who lives with a person on fire with charity. It burned an entire tailor's shop into an apostolate, as next week will show.

DIG DEEPER: THE LOG AND THE FLAME

St. John's image for the whole spiritual life: green wood placed on a fire first blackens, smokes, and weeps out its moisture (this feels, from inside, like the nights of Sessions 5 and 6); only when the moisture is gone does the log catch, glow, and finally do what fire does. Same fire throughout; the wood changes. Ask: where are you on the log, honestly: sputtering, drying, catching, aflame? Does knowing it is one continuous process change how you read your own smoke?

Q4. Pentecost's fire immediately went public: the Spirit-given speech drew the crowd and the message filled the street (Acts 2:4-11), and Thérèse's "I shall be love" was for the whole Body. If Romans 5:5 is true of you, whom is your flame for? Name one act of concrete charity for this week that would count as the fire showing.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Keep this ruthlessly concrete; the session fails if it ends in warm feelings about fire. Prompts: the person in your week hardest to love (Session 1's enemy-love returns); a hidden act of service costing real time or money; a word of witness you have postponed; the parish need nobody volunteers for. Note the shape of the answer to the steelman embedded here: the group's acts of charity this week are the manifestations. Close the question by lighting or pointing to the candle: fire exists by burning; love exists by loving.

SEND

S1. What in you has the Spirit been drying out (the log's long smoke) that you can now name as preparation rather than punishment?

S2. "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). What habit of yours most reliably quenches him, and what will you do about it this week?

Live It This Week

- Memorize Romans 5:5 and pray it each morning with one added word: today. "Poured into my heart... given to me: today let it burn."
- Do the one concrete act of charity you named at Q4, and tell no one except God.
- Pray to the Holy Spirit directly each day this week (many Catholics rarely do): Come, Holy Spirit, kindle in me the fire of your love.

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, living flame of love, you rested on each of them, and you have been poured into each of us. Dry what is green in us, kindle what is ready, and let the fire show this week where fire always shows: in love. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to you, Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE · ROMANS 5:5

"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

The Living Flame

Every passage used, in order

Passage	Where it is used
Rom 5:5	Q1 and memory verse: the love already poured, the Spirit already given
Acts 2:1-11	Discovery: tongues as of fire on each; the fire goes public
Ex 3:2-6; Ex 19:18; 1 Kings 18:38-39	Discovery answer: bush, Sinai, Carmel
Song 8:6-7	Q3: love strong as death; many waters cannot quench it
1 Cor 14:1, 39; CCC 799-801	Steelman: the charisms at full strength
1 Cor 13:1-2; Gal 5:22; Matt 7:16, 21-23	Steelman answer: charity as the test
1 Kings 19:11-12	Steelman answer: the still small voice after Carmel
1 Thess 5:19	Send: do not quench the Spirit