

OCTOBER 23 2025 FATHER JOHN BERTAO

Before we get to reflect on this beautiful, powerful, powerful Gospel of St. Luke, we also—the Church also remembers a saint by the name of John Capistrano, and I found out a little bit about him that I'd like to share with you.

St. John was born in Italy in 1386. He was a lawyer and the governor of the city of Perugia. When enemies of the city threw John into prison, he started to think about the real meaning of life. John's political enemies were in no rush to release him from the jail, so he had plenty of time to realize that what mattered most in life was the salvation of his soul.

So, when he was set free, he entered a Franciscan monastery. He was 30 at that time. For John, life as a poor friar was a big change. He had to sacrifice his independence for the love of Jesus, and he tried with all his heart to do this, to love Jesus more and more.

After he had become a priest, John was sent to a parish to preach. He and his former novice master, St. Bernardine of Siena, spread great devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus everywhere that they were sent. John preached throughout Europe for 40 years. All those who heard him were moved to love and to serve the Lord better all the time.

An outstanding moment in his life was at the Battle of Belgrade. The Turks had made up their minds to conquer Europe and to wipe out the Church of Jesus Christ. The pope sent St. John Capistrano to the Christian kings of Europe and begged them to unify, to fight the Turkish army that was winning. The kings obeyed this poor man, who was poor, probably a little dirty, and

barefoot. He stirred up their love for God and their courage with his fiery words—simple preaching, but with fire and to the point.

Even though a big army of Christians came to fight Mehmed II and his army, it looked as though they would lose. The enemy army was much bigger, and so our saint decided to—at 70 years of age—run ahead to the front lines and encourage the men to keep on fighting, never to give up. And then, go figure, holding his crucifix up high, this small, tiny man cried out loud, “Victory, Jesus! Victory, Jesus!” How beautiful—“Victory.”

And of course, the Christian soldiers felt more full of courage, and they won. They fought until the enemy ran away in fear. St. John Capistrano died of the plague a short time later, on October 23, 1456. He was proclaimed a saint in 1690.

Now, with the help of God, one person—you and I—can do great things. We can ask St. John Capistrano to share with us some of the enthusiasm and the courage to do what is right. It’s so important that we have the courage to do what is right in the name of Jesus Christ and the Church.

And this is where we come into today’s Gospel, where Luke invites us to ask the question: “Do you want to be on fire for Christ?” Do you want to be on fire for Christ, no matter what the consequences? You see, Jesus shocked his disciples when he declared that he would cast fire and cause division rather than peace upon the earth.

What kind of fire did Jesus have in mind? Well, the image of fire in biblical times was often associated with God and with his action in the world and in the lives of the people—such as the burning bush. You’ve heard about that: Moses and the burning bush. Also, fire is a sign and symbol of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Again, I’m sure you’ve heard that before.

I remember when John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. When the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples at Pentecost, tongues of fire appeared above their heads. Jesus’ statement about fire upon the earth was to emphasize the choice and cost of following him above anyone and above anything else.

He wanted to drive home an important lesson—some of us also do the same when we want to make a strong point. You see, the essence of Christianity is loyalty to Jesus Christ, and loyalty takes precedence over every other relationship.

You must be saying, “Oh, Father, it’s easy for you to say that. You’re a priest.” Well, I have friends. I have family as well. And I’ve had, many times, to put Christ above and beyond family and relationships, and I’ve lost some of those relationships. You see, the love of God compels us to choose who will be first in our lives. To place any relationship or anything else above God is a form of idolatry. First God, and then everything else and everyone else.

The question is: who do you love first and foremost? I ask you—are you experiencing division in your family? One that has become very common, and I have addressed it before, is when

two people are living, as we call it, common law. They think it's the normal thing to do. Very normal. So normal that some of them even come to Holy Communion, even though they're in the state of mortal sin. They think it's normal—an okay thing to do.

It's at times like this that our faith in the Ten Commandments and the love of Jesus will help us to state the truth—even when it creates division between you and that individual or those people. You may be disliked, and you may be told off, but it's worth it. My suggestion is don't argue. No. Don't fight. Don't condemn. Just state the truth. State things as they are. Simply state the truth—that it's not right that two people who live together as husband and wife outside the sacrament of marriage should come or participate fully in the sacramental life.

I'm not making up the law—it's in the Ten Commandments, and it's everywhere you see. It's not right for them to do that. So, my suggestion to you is: only inform them, and when making the final decision, please remember that you are not responsible for their salvation. It's really, really important to keep in mind that as long as you tell the truth, that is the important thing. Tell the truth and state it as it is.

Like the priest, St. John Capistrano, venerate the crucifix. It makes everything else so much stronger, so much more powerful. When you have an argument with somebody, just simply state, "Jesus, I love you." Victory. Venerate the crucifix out of great love, because when you venerate the crucifix, he loves you right back and gives you the strength that you need to be and to live the truth for everyone else.

So, I close with a little prayer:

Lord Jesus, may the fire of your love consume me and transform my life, that I may truly desire nothing more than life with you. Jesus, fill me with the power of your Holy Spirit, that I may always seek to please you and to do your will. Amen.