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Sunday, December 12, 2010

Morning Psalms 24; 150
First Reading Isaiah 13:1-13
Second Reading Hebrews 12:18-29
Gospel John 3:22-30
Evening Psalms 25; 110

18 You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, 19 and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. 20 (For they could not endure the order that was given, 'If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.' 21 Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.') 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 25 See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! 26 At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.' 27 This phrase 'Yet once more' indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; 29 for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

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At Mount Sinai, Israelites retreated before the overwhelming power of God, experienced as fire, darkness, storm, and a shattering voice. The full power of God was more than humankind could bear, and in its necessary retreat from God's immediate presence, Israel struggled.

The life and death of Jesus bring a new covenant—a new understanding of God's will for humankind and an invitation to approach God at another mountain, Zion. Here the power of the living God transforms—purifies, orders, and unites. Here God is as a consuming fire.

Service to this live God is rooted in faith and in hearkening to the voice of Jesus, whose life and teaching are evoked in the exhortation that follows in Chapter 13: "Let brotherly love continue . . . Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers . . . Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated. Let marriage be held in honor among you" (Heb 13:1-4). As we await the transformation, the consuming fire is reflected where there is love.

Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you for this season's promise of new life. Strengthen us to do your will and sustain us in faith in things to come. Amen