

A priest is newly assigned to a parish, and one of the parishioners hears that he enjoys playing golf. So, he invites him to play at a local golf course. Some months later, the parish secretary asks the pastor: *'Father, you used to play golf with Arnold, but the two of you don't seem to play together any longer. Did something happen?'*

The pastor replies: *'Well, would you play golf with somebody who kicks his ball out of the rough onto the fairway; or takes countless mulligans; or hits the wrong ball; or doesn't write down the right score on the score card; or keeps hitting ball after ball into the water hazards?'*

She responds: *'No, I probably wouldn't.'*

The pastor says: *'Well, Arnold wouldn't either!'*

God responds to this question quite differently. God offers us an **ADVOCATE** who is **unconcerned** by our **ineffectiveness** and **inconsistencies**. Rather than being **impatient** or **judgmental**, the **ADVOCATE** uses each **mistake**, each **blunder**, each **denial**, each **betrayal**, each **misstep**, and each **sin** against love as a **means** to **help** us and **heal** us. That is, the **Spirit** continually draws us into the **relationship** that **God** has with us; and shows us - somehow - that we are **created** in this **relationship** because God is love. This, too, is **who** we are and **who** we are **becoming**.

The **Spirit** is also **associated** with fire. **Fire**, for example, is a **symbol** used by numerous writers to **describe** the love that they have come to **know**. **Fire**, as it **consumes**, **transforms** the burning material **into** itself. It is this **process** of **transformation** that is used as the **symbol** of the **Spirit** who (often slowly) **transforms** our **humanity** into **divinity**.

Jesus informs us, however, that though a **transformation process** is necessary, **humanity** and **divinity** are eternally joined. One - by **God's** design -

cannot exist without the other. This is the ultimate importance of the **incarnation**.

John of the Cross and later **Thérèse of Lisieux** echo this sentiment. Each uses the **symbol** of a **log burning**. Initially, the **log** doesn't look anything like the **fire**. It stands **apart** even as **flames** swirl around it. Then, it **blackens** as the **fire** strips away outer layers. The **real transformation**, however, happens **within** the **log** where the heat of the **flames** causes the **log's center to catch fire**. Slowly, the **fire within consumes** the **log**. As it does, the **log** begins to appear more and more like the **fire**, until it becomes **difficult** to determine **where the fire ends and the log begins**.

The **fire** of **God's love** is already **within** each of us. We might be **able** to **slow** the **transformation process**, but we **can't** stop it. We are both **log and fire**, **human and divine**.