

THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS AND ENLIGHTENS

About 400 years before the birth of Christ in Judea of the land of Israel the Greek Philosopher Plato was alive and well and living in Athens. He was a moral teacher. One of Plato's major works was called The Republic and in that work, in the seventh chapter is one of his most famous images. It is the story of The Cave.

Three men are chained inside a deep cave all their lives. They have their backs to the opening of the cave and behind them is a fire. Periodically people or animals pass by in front of the flames which cast a shadow on the wall of the cave that the men can see. It is all they have ever known. This world of shadows and dim light. They have no knowledge of any other world.

One of the men breaks free and runs to the entrance of the cave and suddenly is confronted with sunlight and such bright colors that he is almost blinded. Slowly his eyes adjust and he begins to see no longer shadowy figures but real people and animals in full color and vivid clarity. It is a wonderful sensation. Up until this moment he had no idea such a world existed. At that, he rushes back in to the cave to tell the other men of his discovery. But they will have none of it. The shadowy world is all they have ever known and it alone is real. He tries to describe but they cannot believe him or what he describes. It is too good to be true and they think he has made it up. They mock him and he is unsuccessful at getting them to step out into the light and believe because of their own experiences.

A great image. It still applies. There are some in our midst who see clearly and truly and others who do not see clearly or grasp fully –but often they think they do. What is familiar to them is the only truth in their lives. They will not come out and see. I tell this story because Pentecost is a little like those in the cave. In the Gospel of John the apostles and some others are huddled in fear in that Upper Room on that first Easter Sunday night. They have heard the reports from the women who were at the tomb early in the morning. The stone was rolled back. The tomb was empty and the burial cloths were there, rolled up to the side. The body is missing. No one knows where it is nor what has actually happened although they have talked about the empty tomb.

Suddenly Jesus appears in their midst even though the doors are locked. He breathes on them. He wishes them peace. He shows his hands and his side. The apostles are incredulous but overjoyed. However, they are still afraid. We know this because we are told that they gather in fear again exactly one week later when Jesus appears again. Again Jesus breathes his peace, his Spirit upon them. Still they are afraid.

Fast forward to the street scene from today's account in the Acts of the Apostles where the apostles break out into the Temple area in Jerusalem. Like a driving wind the Holy Spirit has come upon them. They are on fire with love of Christ and zeal for his message. They are fearless now, unafraid of the Jewish Religious leaders or the Roman soldiers.

So. How do we explain the difference in these apostles? How explain this transformation? Something obviously happened to them. They are different. Fear is gone. Courage is in their hearts. How? What is the explanation? For there must be an explanation. On Easter Sunday when Jesus breathes on them the Holy Spirit is poured out gently and begins to abide within them. But they do not know that. They do not understand that. They do not realize that. Yes. They have the

Holy Spirit. Yes they have received the Holy Spirit. But on Pentecost something else happens. On Pentecost it is not that they have the Holy Spirit. It is that the Holy Spirit has them! And when the Holy Spirit takes hold in us we are different.

So each of us must ask. Has the Holy Spirit taken hold in my life, taken hold of me?

How can I tell?

- 1) Are my personal and family decisions based more in hope than in fear? Then the Holy Spirit has taken hold.
- 2) Do I desire my family members and friends to come to know the Lord Jesus as I know him? Then the Holy Spirit has taken hold.
- 3) Do I ask the Lord to help me and guide me and enlighten me and those I know and love each day? Then the Holy Spirit has taken hold.
- 4) Am I willing to stand up for the truth and to defend the innocent even if it costs me? Then the Holy Spirit has taken hold.
- 5) Have I learned to hate the sin but not hate the sinner? Then the Holy Spirit has taken hold.
- 6) Have I accepted forgiveness from the Lord and forgiven myself and others for their sins against me? Then the Holy Spirit has taken hold.
- 7) Is there a desire for purity, honesty, truthfulness, generosity of spirit informing your life choices? Then the Holy Spirit has taken hold.
- 8) Do you really believe that there is a Kingdom of God revealed by Jesus and that you have been invited to live there forever? Then the Holy Spirit has taken hold.

My friends, The Holy Spirit of the Living God has been poured out. "If Jesus had limited himself to just proclaiming a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you." It would have remained what it was before, like all the other commandments (an impossible ideal, out of reach). But at Pentecost he poured forth his own love into the hearts of his disciples by means of the Holy Spirit. In that moment it became a new law, the law of the Spirit which gives life (Cantalamessa). He empowered them—and us. It is necessary to believe in the Holy Spirit to unleash its power. Without the power of the Holy Spirit we can want to live but we cannot truly live in the new creation. We are still back in the cave.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.