

Column090620

Companions on the Journey

September 6, 2020

Dear Friends,

For most of my lifetime Labor Day was a signal. Summer was over. Schools were open again. Vacation time was in the rearview mirror. It was always a time to “saddle up” and get back to our ordinary responsibilities. But not this year. This year is different. And I sense a harbinger of something different that is being born even as we go through it and are not sure exactly what it is we are giving birth to. It will no doubt be human for it will be born of our humanity. But it will be more than that. There will be more Artificial Intelligence involved in all that transpires going forward.

Personally, I am not frightened by that prospect. Artificial Intelligence is just that artificial. It is the child of our human creativity and our ardent endeavors. But there is always something else that is involved wherever there is creativity, ingenuity, intuition, and genius at work. And that extra ingredient is the essential ingredient. It is the grace of God. Humans, in some form or another, have been on this planet for several million years. Primitive yes but still human. Growth and development were painfully slow. Incrementally slow. For centuries and millennia and for eons. Only the slowest of progress. But in the last two thousand years especially human development, creativity, ingenuity, intuition and genius have taken off, soared in all the arts and the human sciences. Now in the whole world of technology. Why the last two thousand years? What happened two thousand years ago that could account for a new spirit everywhere on the face of the earth, a new spirit generating in a way theretofore unknown?

Well, there was Jesus of Nazareth upon whom descended the Holy Spirit in the moment of his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. The Holy Spirit of God was unleashed anew in that moment and then again on Easter Sunday night in the Upper Room when Jesus breathes on the apostles and bids them breathe in the Holy Spirit and its newness, its forgiveness, its being full of life stronger than death.

Jesus issues no recriminations, points no fingers at those despondent disciples. They all knew they let him down. They all knew they failed him in the time of his greatest need. And what does he do in this moment when he has risen from the grave? Does he descend upon them in fury and castigate them? No. He breathes a life-giving Spirit into them. It takes a while, but then seven weeks later, on the fiftieth day—called Pentecost, that same Holy Spirit is unleashed upon the face of the earth in and through all those gathered in that Upper Room. And, my friends, I submit to you that the world has never been the same. It still has darkness but there is hope and possibility and creativity and compassion.

Something new is dawning on the face of the earth and we are all witnesses to it. Let us not be afraid. Let us be careful though. Let us be trusting. Let us be prayerful. Let us ask our God to send his Spirit to guide and to enlighten all those involved in this new creation which will literally and figuratively cover the face of the earth. God will penetrate all technology and thus become the condition for the possibility of great things unfolding even as we guard against the wiles of the enemy who always seeks to tear down and destroy. My friends, the outcome of the battle is assured. The victory has been won. But there is still much work to be done and still battles to be fought. But the new heavens and new earth. They are underway. Let us dare to believe—even with all that is going on in our country and world at the present time. That is what our Catholic faith bids us do.

In the Peace of Christ,

Msgr. McHenry