

GOD'S TRANSFORMATIONAL SPIRIT

On that first Easter night, when the doors were locked where the disciples were, “Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you!’ When he had said this he showed them his hands and his side.”

Why? Not why did Jesus enter the Upper Room. Why does he wish them peace instead of calling them on the carpet? And why, when he shows them his wounds, does it not appear as if he is being vindictive or shaming them in any way? His wounds. There is something about his wounds. They almost seem like an authenticating sign to them. “Hey, guys. It really is Jesus whom you saw nailed and die. These wounds should be a proof for you.” A proof of what? That he really is now alive, the One whom they loved, the One whom they followed, the One in whom they put all their faith, they very same One they had seen die such a cruel death on Calvary. That One. Yes. That One is now alive. Fully alive. Alive in such a way that he will never die again.

How can this be? How did this happen? Who can pass from death to life? What man can undergo such a transformation? The God/man can. The One on whom the Spirit descended at his baptism. Only the One who came from God and is God and is Man can undergo such a transformation. There must be something about such a man. Something about the Spirit of the man. And that Spirit? That Spirit is the very Spirit of Transformation. There was never anyone like Jesus. Nor will there ever be again. There is nothing that can compare to the Spirit of the Man/God from Galilee.

And his wounds are not just signs of all that he has undergone in the body. They are signs of the deeper wounds he underwent—the betrayal, the rejection, the false accusations, the abandonment, the cowardly response of so many who were his best friends. Jesus shows them his visible wounds but also reveals all the other wounds that have been inflicted. Again. Why? Because those to whom he appears, those to whom he comes—they are also so full of wounds. Not so much physical but personal, relational, spiritual, emotional. There is something very different about his wounds. They have a power. He breathes that power upon them all that night. “Receive the Holy Spirit,” he breathes out upon them. Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven. And it begins with his own forgiveness of them accomplished in and through the Holy Spirit.

On that first Easter night Jesus endows them with the Holy Spirit. It is gentle but very real. They do not realize right away what is happening. That will take time. Six or seven weeks before they begin to realize. Some things just take time. They waited. They were patient. More or less. They struggled. More rather than less. They went back to fishing. That didn't work at all. Jesus keeps appearing to them. Keeps revealing things to them right up until he ascends to his Father. He sends them on mission. Teach the good news. Baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And then on that Sunday of Pentecost they who had already had the Holy Spirit breathed upon them will be seized by that same Holy Spirit. But why? There is that question again. Because without the Spirit there is something missing. We can't get there on our own. Can't get where? Can't get beyond their own wounds, many of them self-inflicted though not all. Without the Spirit we can't get beyond the blame and the shame. Can't get beyond the denial and the rationalizations. Can't get to real forgiveness. Can't get beyond their own fears. Can't get from being a sinner to being a saint. Can't get from bread and wine to the Body and Blood of Christ.

My friends, Christ is transformational. It is his Spirit which transforms our hearts, our lives, our souls, our very selves into the holy ones God desires us to be. We cannot get there on our own. But thanks be to God we do not have to. His Spirit has hold of us now. And so, what is our response? What does the Lord ask of us, want of us? The very same thing he asks of Mary and wants of Mary. Her response is "Let it be done to me as you say." And with that the Holy Spirit overshadows her and the One to be called the Christ is conceived in her. And it will be thus with us. Christ is conceived in our hearts, not our wombs. And this can happen precisely because he has become like us, the wounded one, but fully in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When you seek the truth in your daily lives you are living in the power of the Spirit. When you choose harmony over discord and strife...when you resist the allure of evil...when you stand for what you believe in Christ...when you seek to form your family in faith...when you sacrifice for the sake of others...when you persevere despite the obstacles...when you give good and wise counsel...when you keep praying—you are living in the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. You have entered the very kingdom of God, not completely but truly.

You may not have felt the power of the Spirit welling up within you as the disciples did on that first Pentecost. Nevertheless, the Spirit indwells your very soul. Good habits liberate the Spirit; bad habits limit the Spirit. Conviction and faith unleash the power of the Spirit; fear and doubt close off the Spirit. Habits of virtue liberate; habits of vice imprison. There is a big difference between having information about something or someone, being informed—and truly being inspired by that person, caught up in that which is right and true and just. And we live ever more fully in the Spirit when we pray more and pray more on a daily basis. And we can tell that the Spirit is at work in us in those areas where we just aren't afraid anymore. The transforming power of the Holy Spirit is real, it is given and is unleashed as our faith deepens—a grace for which we pray this day.

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