

May 12, 2021

Wednesday of the sixth week of Easter

Acts: 17: 15, 22-18:1

Psalm 148

John 16: 7,12-15

I was in the check-out line at Meijer when I sensed I was being watched by a young child who was sitting in the grocery cart ahead of me as the mother busily put things on the conveyor belt.

Hardly 6 months old, she had locked eyes with mine. She would not turn away. I could not turn away. Her gaze was steady. I winked, waved, smiled. She would have none of it. She only kept looking – never taking her eyes off of my eyes.

I finally stopped my own attempts to entertain her and simply rested in her gaze. It went on for several minutes. It felt very personal.

Then she was rolled away by her mother and I was next in line putting my things on the counter. But not without an astounding awareness that we were locked in a mutual contemplation – looking into the mirror of each other's soul.

That is what it was and it was all rather intimate. In fact, it was delivered to me as a gift.

I bring all this up because the Gospel selection today again invites us into the intimacy of the Upper Room where Jesus looks intently at those he loved. He shares with them many words of his union with his Father and going back to the Father to send another Advocate – the Holy Spirit.

The disciples' questions reveal their fear and confusion about Jesus' words – like: "It is better for you that I go." (How can it be better?) And "I have much more to tell you, but you will not understand now. Later you will." (Why not now? Later might be too late!)

Over and over, Jesus keeps the promise clear. The Holy Spirit, the Advocate, will be your teacher and guide you to the Truth. He assures them that the Holy Spirit speaks his words that come from the Father.

The Holy Spirit will come not as an external focus of guidance but will enter their own spirits, enlighten their minds and fill their hearts with the power to continue the work of Jesus. If Jesus remains with them, this transfer will not occur. The Holy Spirit is the Inner Teacher.

Here is where the intimate, very personal contemplative gaze comes in.

How is that?

It has to do with the human learning process in which there are two moments.

The first moment is when the message is proclaimed. The teacher gives the presentation. The student listens and takes in the words, the examples, the illustrations. The teacher is active and, in this moment, the student is passive.

The second moment of learning is when the listener, the student, takes in the teaching into their consciousness – thinking it over, mulling it, allowing curious questions, entertaining thoughts and even problems to solve. In this moment the student is active, allowing the teaching to take hold and to move them to a conviction or an action.

For Jesus, the first moment was living in the companionship of the disciples, sharing close teachings, the witness of his compassionate care and mercy to individuals and crowds. Even pointed conflicts had a lesson in them.

Jesus said and did what he heard from his Father. He was sent to be the Word of God to the world. He fulfilled that mission in full sight of others on our Earth in a particular culture, a particular century and to a particular people. We could say that Jesus, in his totally human nature had particular boundaries of time and space. The boundaries ended when Jesus rose and ascended into Heaven. He was no longer physically present to the disciples as he was on Earth.

For the disciples, the second moment happened with the work of the Spirit in them as they contemplated the teaching, understood it anew in their present experience and went about their lives with a deeper awareness. This all led to convictions, which led to action in preaching and in the development of the Church. Now they know what Jesus means – “It is better that I go” and “you don’t get it now, but you will later.”

The Spirit is uniquely in the world but not incarnated in flesh and not visible to the human eye, not confined or limited to any time and place but rather moves freely to be in all people, in the hearts and minds of every culture, century and individual and so, in the present time and in us.

We need both moments of learning, of course. But the importance of the second moment is clear. We need the second moment. To become one with the Word of God, Jesus makes it possible in the Sending of the Spirit. This is why it is better that he goes ... and why we will understand later.

We hear the teaching again today. The Spirit moves again unlimited and freely in this time, in these circumstances and in the way each of us contemplates in that second moment.

When we trace our finger over the Gospel words today – when we stop on a word or phrase or simply close our eyes to hear it again – that is when the second moment begins. We invite in our Inner Teacher, the Spirit of Jesus.

The progression of spiritual development is quite amazing! Ever-revealing, ever-deepening, clarifying and integrating.

Our attention, our contemplative gaze is often beyond words. Sometimes the silence feels strangely strong. Other times it is just a waiting.

Even still – there is a third moment. It happens when we are rolled away into movement and action. We call that the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

As with the disciples, we too, have taken to the streets, the classrooms, the parishes, the Areopagus of our cities and towns. We have been taught well – by the Gospel, by our traditions, our community and by our Inner Teacher in prayer and contemplation.

The teaching continues, the unblinking gaze continues and the fruits will follow wherever we are and wherever we are called. When we walk willingly into that second moment, we can be open to all of life in creation, in ourselves, others and in the anguish of our times and we can respond.

Whether it be quiet prayer for the immense needs of the world or the untiring practice of openness, compassion and faithfulness in our work and action, the Divine Spirit of Jesus will hold us in every moment.