



Come and See!

May 20, 2018, Pentecost

The Word...

Brothers and sisters, live by the Spirit...
the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such there is no law.

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh
with its passions and desires.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit.

(from Gal 5:16-25)

Pondering the Word...

"Brothers and sisters, live by the Spirit...If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit."

It sounds self-evident, doesn't it? If I claim to be a Christian, to have received the gift of Christ's Spirit, it only makes sense that I should follow the Spirit in all aspects of my life. Oh, how often I fall short! How often I forget to seek the Spirit's guidance as I go about my ordinary day.

In his most recent exhortation, "Gaudete et Exsultate" ("Rejoice and Be Glad"), Pope Francis calls the whole world to holiness and highlights the importance of discernment as we make decisions in our lives—not just the big decisions, but the ones we face each day: How do I respond to another's rudeness or self-centeredness? What do I do when faced with the temptation to procrastinate or spend too much time on social media? How do I process my anger, even justifiable anger at injustice? What do I do to respond to a situation instead of react? *"The gift of discernment has become all the more necessary today, since contemporary life offers immense possibilities for action and distraction...We need it at all times, to help us recognize God's timetable, lest we fail to heed the prompting of his grace and disregard his invitation to grow."* (Sections 167, 169)

The incredible gift of the Spirit we received at Baptism and Confirmation is not meant to be stored away, just to be dusted off on the Sabbath, in church, or at special events. It is a gift that permeates our very being; a gift that must inform the entirety of our lives if we are to belong to Christ Jesus.

Living the Word...

Discernment is a cornerstone of Ignatian Spirituality; another is awareness. It doesn't make much sense to try to discern what actions to take if we are not in tune with the situation at hand. I shudder to think of the times I have, with all good intention, misread a situation and responded in a way that only made things worse. If we exercise the Spirit's gifts of patience and gentleness, we give ourselves time and space to become more aware and respond with compassion and self-control.

Becoming aware takes lots of practice and constant tending. Stop every so often during the day. Take yourself out of the picture and just observe without judgment. If you know you are going to be especially challenged, consciously ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to respond in holiness to whatever is presented. You've got this!

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

May 21: *Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister....* (Jn 19:25-34)

In the fourth "week" or movement of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, he suggests the pray-er contemplate the Risen Jesus appearing to his mother. While there is no Scripture reference about such an appearance, Ignatius invites us to imagine the love Jesus has for Mary and his desire to have her be the first to share in his glory. All that pondering she has had to do...all that pain she has had to endure. I believe Mary's faith in God's promise would remain no matter such an appearance, but what a great and poignant gift this image presents to us! Think about this any time darkness takes over in your life. Pray to Mary to "place you with her Son."

May 22: *"In the city I see violence and strife; day and night they prowl about upon its walls. Cast your care upon the LORD, and he will support you..."* (Ps 55)

The image of violence and strife prowling around our cities is all too real. While the psalmist's plea is for his safety, casting our cares upon the Lord doesn't mean we are concerned just for ourselves. Let us all care about every life ruined or lost, every family torn apart by violence. Let us all care about the inequities at the root of much of this sadness. Don't lose hope or be disheartened or become immune. Through your prayers and good works, reaching out to those who live in fear, the Lord will support you. Allow God to shoulder your cares.

May 23: *"There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us."* (Mk 9:38-40)

I have some difficulty with Jesus' words here. How do they relate to his words from Matthew 12:30 "Whoever is not with me is against me?" The context is essential. In Mark, Jesus is teaching John if someone is driving out demons in his name, then that person is accessing the Spirit of God; it wouldn't happen otherwise. Just because he isn't part of the "main group" doesn't mean the gift of healing can't be granted if his belief is sincere—a good message to those who insist that one must be from this or that denomination in order to be saved. In Matthew's Gospel, the context is again about the spirit active in a person; in this case, Satan is being referenced as the source. What I struggle with though is that there are plenty of people in the world who are not against Jesus or Christianity per se, but do little to combat the rule of the world. Ambivalence always favors the status quo. Are you okay with the status quo these days? If so, just sit back, I guess. But if not, what answer do you have for Jesus: "Are you with me?"

May 24: *"Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries. Your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten..."* (Jas 5:1-6) *"Blessed are the poor in spirit; the Kingdom of heaven is theirs!"* (Mt 5:3)

I often wonder how those promoting the so-called "prosperity gospel" preach on passages like this from the Letter of James. But I have to look at my own life as well and compare the affluence in which I live to a vast majority of the earth's people. "Judge not that ye be not judged," I have to remind myself. Going back to Pope Francis' recent exhortation, he elaborates on the first beatitude: "The Gospel invites us to peer into the depths of our heart, to see where we find our security in life...Wealth ensures nothing...Luke (6:20) invites us to live a plain and austere life, to share in the life of those most in need..." (Sections 67-70) A question to ask ourselves: "What do I need to free myself from in order to free myself for God's work?" If we spend all our time tending to our wealth and possessions, we'll likely miss out on the greatest treasure of all.

May 25: *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he put our transgressions from us."* (Ps 103)

How far have you put your transgressions from yourself? Oh, it's usually pretty easy to distract ourselves as we go about our day, but my many transgressions seem to make an appearance on nights when I'm feeling weak and vulnerable. And it's that much worse if I've been lax in prayer. If we have atoned for our sins, God is not interested in replaying those tapes. The next time old sins and transgressions show up, say a quick, sincere prayer of thanks to Jesus who died to set you free. Honor his sacrifice by releasing yourself from the past.

May 26: *"O LORD, set a watch before my mouth, a guard at the door of my lips."* (Ps 141)...

... "a gentle hand upon mine before I hit 'send,' a second and third thought before I post on Facebook, the wisdom to respond rather than react to that text..." *"Before you speak, let your words pass through three gates. At the first gate, ask yourself 'Is it true'? At the second, ask, 'Is it necessary'? At the third, 'Is it kind'?"* (Sufi proverb)