

In the Lukan account which we have heard this morning, the writer presents the readers with one distinct memory of Jesus that lacks in other Gospel accounts. Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus instructed the disciples to stay in the city, until they received the power. The writer of Luke has also written the Book of Acts, and he describes in the book how the promise made in Luke was fulfilled. This power that Jesus promised is the Holy Spirit that came down upon the believers who gathered together in Jerusalem (Acts 2). That day is known as the Pentecost, counting 50 days from the Easter, which the Christians around the world will celebrate next Sunday, as the day the church was born.

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus made two imperatives to the disciples: 1) repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem; 2) stay in the city until they have been clothed with power from on high.

If we follow the Lukan Jesus' instruction, the main focus of the Christian message is: repentance and forgiveness of sins, and the gift of power from on high. And all the subsequent Christian writings agree that the Christians shared the experience of this phenomenon—the gift of “power”—the Holy Spirit, given to the believers. This gift was not just a cerebral teaching to be processed in the brain, but was a concrete, daily experience the Christians shared.

Spiritually growing people try to share with others what they have experienced. As they come to discover that others also have gone through the exactly the same experience that took place inside their own hearts, they tend to affirm one another. It is exciting, it is empowering, and it is inspiring to hear from others that they have gone through exactly what you have.

The faith Community becomes stronger, when those who have experienced the Holy Spirit come together and share their

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experiences. That experience is not a coded claim that makes sense only to the few insiders, but an experience that others could also vouch for.

Christian discipleship is more than confessing a set of beliefs. It does consist of the courage to admit one's own guilt and to accept God's forgiving grace. The Christian Discipleship is living the life empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is a daily life pulsating with the power of the Holy Spirit. Early Christians affirmed to one another as a shared experience this phenomenon of the Holy Spirit.

The problem is, not many of us today can honestly say for sure that we have experienced the Holy Spirit, and that we continue to experience the power of the Holy Spirit on daily basis. So, is the Holy Spirit something real, or is it something only others claim to feel, but not me? If the Holy Spirit is something Jesus promised, one may wonder, why have I yet to receive it?

The Holy Spirit's power must have the distinct quality to it, so that it separates itself from other experiences we can find in this secular world. Is the experience of the Holy Spirit similar to what you would feel, when your football team wins the Super Bowl by one point with two seconds to go? I cannot imagine that God would duplicate an experience that is commonly found in the secular world, and sacrifice Jesus for it.

Some might wonder, why people have difficulty experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit. I thought about it, and I came up with these reasons. First of all, we have too much power and resources. We have our financial power. We have our military power. We have our political power. When we have these powers, why do we need the power of the Holy Spirit? Independently-minded people tend to resort to their own power to resolve the issues that they face.

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Secondly, the Holy Spirit is a gentle Spirit, and it does not compete with the secular powers for a foothold. Apostle Paul tells us that it is even possible to quench the Spirit (I Thess. 5:19). The writer of the Revelation wrote of the Spirit:

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

If people invited the Holy Spirit into their lives, the Spirit would have entered long ago.

Thirdly, people tend to mistake the power of the Holy Spirit for the secular powers I have listed above. They ask God to be the financier, the military adviser, and the political ally. How fair is it to ask God to be the kind of God we want God to be?

Lastly, people tend to come to ask God, only when they realize that they ran out of their options. Once their trouble is over, they go back to the previous way of

living their lives. They are mainly committed to their own power and resources, except the time when their power and resources fail them. The Holy Spirit does not like to be the broom in the closet: it is needed only when we need it, and then forgotten promptly.

There are challenges in life that we can deflect with our financial resources. There are things in life that we can solve with our own wits. But there is a thing in life that nothing we have can solve: that is the transformation of the heart of a person.

Many times, the challenges, the agony, and the tragedy are caused by the way our hearts desire. Families break apart, children and parents turn against each other, friends betray trust, and people prey upon one another. The power Jesus promised to us is found neither in the financial power, nor in the military power, nor in the political power.

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The power of the Holy Spirit is found in the transformation of the human heart. And if our hearts are not ready to invite the Holy Spirit in, the Holy Spirit will not barge in to take over our lives.

Who has the time and patience to wait for the transformation of the hearts? Isn't it more effective to use our money to oil the squeaky door hinges than wait for the door to oil itself? Isn't it economical to deploy our military than wait for the enemy to change its mind? And isn't it efficient to manipulate the politicians to pass the law that protects my interest than convince the rest of the nation to accept my terms?

It is very hard to wean from the companionship of the secular resources and tools. The transformation of the human hearts is too uncertain, too unfathomable, and too unreliable. Who is foolish enough to put one's trust in others' hearts? It is no wonder that the coming of the

kingdom of God has been delayed century after century.

Nevertheless, God has decided to rely upon the hearts of people, than upon the human devices of money, military, and law. Prophet Jeremiah prophesied (Ch. 31) thus God's intent:

³³ But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

God is not interested in our powers: God is interested in our hearts. Once we invite the Holy Spirit into our lives, the Holy Spirit will empower us. Once our hearts are transformed, God transforms our lives, and we will transform the world.
