



From A Bishop's Journal (686)

Moved by the Spirit (2)

From Fear to Courage

Fear seems to have always been the lot of individuals and nations. Just look at the countless thousands of survivors of wars and terrorism, at the victims of earthquakes and tsunamis, of famines and other disasters. Some people even develop uncontrollable phobias to possible dangerous bacteria or illnesses. There are some who are frightened to board a plane or any other kind of conveyance.

Justifiable Fears?

Around the year 30 A.D., the Apostles had hidden in the Upper Room, with all doors locked. They were afraid. The events they had witnessed in the last few days could justify their fear. They had witnessed Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and there was nothing to indicate that some evil plan was being plotted against their Master. Then, after a few moments of prayer at Gethsemani, a crowd with swords and clubs apprehended Jesus and led him to his worst fate: an unjust trial, flogging, spitting on him, humiliations of all kinds, condemnation to death, and crucifixion on Golgotha. Nothing could stop these people who were out for blood. Denials, betrayal, desertion, all of that had happened within a very short time. Jesus had died and been buried. The disciples were cowering behind the doors of the Upper Room where Jesus had given the greatest sign of his love by instituting the Eucharist. We can well understand the unbelief of some of them, on Easter day, when they were told that Jesus had risen from the dead. They did not dare believe it. Only Jesus' very presence among them took away their concern and their fear.

“Peace be with You”

Saint John the Evangelist describes the Easter scene: *On the evening of that first day of the week, even though the disciples had locked the doors of the place where they were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood before them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. At the sight of the Lord the disciples rejoiced. 'Peace be with you,' he said again. 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' Then he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound.'* We can hardly imagine such a scene, and such joy. The disciples had witnessed or heard

about the resurrection of Lazarus, a few days before. But imagine: They were seeing with their own eyes the one who had died on the cross and whom God had raised from the dead. The love of God the Father was stronger than hatred, injustice, suffering, and death itself.

Reminders that Give Courage

The fifty days following the great event of the Resurrection of Jesus were very fruitful both for the Apostles themselves and for the disciples as a whole. Some of them had certainly gone back to their jobs, but the disciples gathered together to pray, according to Jewish custom. Then they would recall what had happened in Jesus' life and in their own. They would also remember everything they had been through. This brought them to a better understanding of Jesus' words and of many events they had experienced with him.

“You Will Receive Power”

During forty days Jesus appeared to his disciples and talked to them about the Kingdom of God. Then, at a meal he shared with them he asked them not to leave Jerusalem and to wait for the fulfillment of the Father's promise. *John baptized with water, but within a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth.* When they came back into the city they went to the Upper Room where they were staying. Together they devoted themselves to constant prayer. There were some women in their company, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Pentecost

As the Hebrews had celebrated the first Pentecost with the Covenant at Sinai fifty days after being led out of Egypt, so did the disciples, fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, experience the great event of the Christian Pentecost. The Spirit of Jesus came on them and led them along the world's highways to raise up and develop a large family of believers in the love of God made known in the Risen Jesus: *When the day of Pentecost came it found them gathered in one place. Suddenly from up in the sky there came a noise like a strong, driving wind which was heard all through the house where they were seated. Tongues as of fire appeared, which parted and came to rest on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to express themselves in foreign tongues and make bold proclamation as the Spirit prompted them.*

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