

**The Spirit of the Lord** Third Sunday of Advent/B December 14, 2014 9:00 AM  
**Is 6:1-2a, 10-11; 1 Thes 5:16-24; Jn 1:6-8, 19-28** (The answer may astonish us, and transform us. We have to discern, study our Scriptures, pray.)

**“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.”**

You may recognize this reading from the prophet Isaiah. It is also in the Gospel of Luke. It's the scroll Jesus read the first time he went as a male elder to the synagogue to read. It's not by coincidence either that this is what he read because it's, in a way, his, if I dare say, theme song. **Jesus found life in this reading from Isaiah** in a way he did not find life in many other Old Testament readings. So we have to keep in mind about Jesus, he was fully human. He had to learn and he had to grow, and **part of learning and growing is deciding what's important in one's life, including one's faith life.** So the way Jesus and mind you—**this deciding influences how we turn out**, what kind of person we are.

For example if we believe that God is a judge, first and foremost, forever distinguishing the good from the bad, forever condemning those who fail, well then, we will become very judgmental because we want to be like God. Jesus did not pick this aspect of God out of the Old Testament and take it to himself. He left it behind. It's there, but he left it behind. So the way he turned out was not predestined. None of the ways we turn out is predestined. **We choose what is important to us and we grow into it, or we fail to choose and we end up however.** But that's also our choice. So Jesus and we together choose what elements of our faith tradition are important, and that has an effect on us for better or for worse until the end of our lives.

And it should be obvious that not every element in any faith tradition, including the Christian, not every element is really very godly, because the divine and the human are always mixed up, and **human beings have a way of distorting the divine.** It's just one of our basic flaws. So **Jesus had to navigate through the waters of Jewish religious beliefs** and Jewish books called the Torah; the Prophets, and the Writings. He had to navigate through all that and **find what resonated with his personal knowledge of the Father.** And what did he pick? **Isaiah.** He didn't pick everything; he picked particularly Isaiah, a life of joyful sharing of glad tidings with the suffering of the world, healing the sick, raising the fallen, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, indeed **a life of joyfully serving other people, lifting up other people.** That's how he got his energy, if you want to call it that. **That's how he found his place, his vocation, his meaning in the world.**

Now on the way, he encountered all the oral teaching of the rabbis, and the New Testament is full of all kinds of arguments and discussions he had with them, where he sparred with them trying to give them a different point of view, often being rejected. But then he was also capable of rejecting their ideas too. **He was very selective.** But he did not choose what he believed based on what was convenient; in fact, it led to the cross. This was not convenient or easy. It wasn't something according to his taste but, rather, **something that fit his sense of the Father's heart.** He knew the Father, and if he didn't know the Father in a unique way, then we should not follow him. **We follow him because he comes from God, because he reveals to us what we cannot know for ourselves.**

However, **he promised to send his Spirit to all believers so that we too can know the heart of the Father as he did.** So we cannot say, well, we don't know any better, or ask, How can we possibly know anything? Yes, we can. Jesus sends the Spirit. So obviously if we want to be followers of Jesus, we have to follow the way Jesus saw the Father. The New Testament is very coherent about that. There is no disagreement. The Old Testament: many different views of God; the New Testament: very clear on what Jesus said.

So now the question is for us: **How do we express in our own personal lives what Jesus expressed in his? How do we sustain a joyful spirit even amid the turbulence and injustices of our world as he did? We need to be quiet long enough to answer these questions.** So we know then that we have to **return to the New Testament to listen to what Jesus says about the Father.** And we have to be in prayer listening to the Spirit's testimony. We also need to gather regularly with other believers, because the word of God is broken in community. It's not a "me" thing; it's an "us" thing. So this is an **ongoing work for all of us to uncover the authentic face of God as Jesus has shown it.** And I must add, it's not magic. It doesn't happen automatically just because we grow up in a so-called Catholic family.

Some years ago some friends of mine started wearing little wristbands with the letters WWJD on it, and it meant, of course: **What Would Jesus Do?** This is a very good question, but some of my friends thought that the answer was rather obvious. It isn't; **it's not obvious what Jesus would do. This is what we have to discern.** This is why we have to **study our Scriptures.** This is why **we have to pray.** So indeed, let us ask: What would Jesus do, or what would Jesus say, or how would Jesus act in the world that we are living in? The answer may astonish us, and it also may transform us.