

New Language for New Ideas Second Week of Easter Monday, April 24, 2017
8:15 AM Acts 4:23-31; Jn 3:1-8 (St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen, priest and martyr)
(Dialogue with Nicodemus)

“What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit.”

Now some commentators accuse John of being what they call a dualist, meaning not putting the whole human person together, separating spirit and flesh, which literally is what this text says. But the point of the text is this that **what you see is not what you get. If we live only by our senses, we will pick up only the surface of reality, including our own reality.** There is a whole dimension to human life that is utterly beyond the scope of our senses and for us to even know about this **we have to develop a sort of sixth sense, a sort of extrasensory perception which is of spirit.**

So this hidden dimension wherein the mystery of our own lives and identity unfold, this is something we need to pay attention to. And when we pay attention to this and when we allow God’s word to take place within us, **we do experience a sort of rebirth.** So Nicodemus’ question of course is a misunderstanding, which is typical of the Fourth Gospel. If you notice, people are always misunderstanding on purpose, so that an explanation can come forth. We don’t reenter our mother’s womb when our mother is our physical mother. **We enter the womb of our spiritual mother,** which is the Church, which is another way of talking about **the baptismal font; that is the womb of rebirth. Baptism, which is the work of water and Spirit does bring about something new that does not really proceed through physical evolution.** And that’s the point that this text is making.

This is the work of what we call grace. It is not the inexorable result of physical processes. It is something else: a gift of the Spirit. There’s something at work in our lives. **It is not simply of the physical order and this needs to draw our attention.** And we need to pay attention to it

because **our attention itself is part of our spirit**. Although we cannot have attention without our brains, **the very existence of our brains does not actually provide the fullness of human consciousness. So there is a coming together of two different orders of reality**. This is what the text is talking about.

And it is very difficult to talk about it in ordinary language. Ordinary language isn't based on this sort of perception. So **when the evangelists try to describe who we really are, in a way, they have to invent vocabulary and concepts and ideas**. And that's what John is doing in this dialogue with Nicodemus. Unfortunately many Christians misunderstand this and take it to be some sort of simple emotional experience of closeness to God. Much more is actually intended. It would be worthy of our own meditation and prayer.