

Sermon 28.05.2017

Focus Scriptures: Acts:1. 6-14; 1 Ptr :4.12-14/ 5. 6-11; Jn 17. 1-11.

The spiritual vitality and richness in God's Living Word can overwhelm us with multifaceted resonances of reassuring truth.

There are times, like today, when our Sunday Scripture readings are so laden with rich pickings that one risks getting some 'spiritual indigestion'.

Interestingly, Scripture's remedy for 'spiritual indigestion' is simply meditate. To meditate on a scripture is to chew it over and over until your spirit extracts +digests its nourishing Truth.

This form of meditation very different to the 'emptying' meditations of the East. The Hebraic form is solidly practical...it is to quietly repeat the passage and fill the mind with the spirit filled word of God ; for as Jesus informs us:

*'The words I have spoken... are **spirit** and they are **life**.'*

This Spirit appears in Acts....when we hear the ascending Jesus promise the supernatural power of His Spirit;

*" you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (us); and that (we)you will be my(His) **witnesses**..."*

When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives we receive power...power to witness to the wonders of the Glorified Jesus and power proclaim His transforming words with equally transforming actions.

The angels, on standby, tell us more:

"This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

He'll be back...and in the interim His Holy Spirit will dwell with

and in us.

Today, we continue to celebrate Christ's Ascension into heaven where He is *seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*'

Interestingly in our gospel, though His grim Passion is still before Him, Jesus:

'who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...'

acts and speaks as if it were already passed. He is alive with homecoming expectancy.

(Jesus) *looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify (dignify, ennoble, exalt enthrone) your Son so that the Son may glorify you..... I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.*

So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory⁵ that I had in your presence(The Shekhinah Glory) before the world existed.

With Jesus ascended the Father releases the Holy Spirit to descend and operate in place of Jesus ... to operate until, in the fullness of time, Jesus returns to usher in the Kingdom of God.

The impartation of the Holy Spirit establishes the Church of Christ making next Sunday our birthday.

In anticipation of that let us take this week as a time of personal spiritual evaluation and preparation; taking example from the Ascension Day witnesses who:

returned to Jerusalem...(+were). constantly devoting themselves to prayer...'

Taking spiritual stock is always a good idea. It is a opportune time to seek renewal from the Holy Spirit of God.

Significantly the Spirit, who raised Christ Jesus from the dead is

foreshadowed as the dove in Noah's Ark....The dove who actively seeks a resting place in and on each of us.

+Peter's letter is a good starting point for us..... he knew first hand that following The Way of the Lord is not always plane sailing. Peter's spiritual life, like ours, had its mighty highs and depressing lows.

.Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal (Paul speaks of fiery darts) that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you..., for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

Throughout our lives as Christians, our spiritual fitness, and readiness are tested and stretched by our loving Father. Built into our sanctification is a process of spiritual refinement and consolidation. This experience is rarely effortless or stressless....especially as we must also steadfastly contend with *'our adversary, the devil, (who)like a roaring lion prowls around, looking for someone to devour./gulp down.'*

Relationship with God is a living ongoing reality.

It is not static ... as we grow so it must mature.

When spiritual growth is in the wind, old certainties will not appear so certain as before. This can be frightening and depressing.

The Holy Spirit, in love, moves on our spirit, nudging us discomfiting us so that we become dissatisfied with where we are at in our fellowship with God.

This time of growth can often be a barren, desolate and dry wilderness.

We question everything, and sense no certainties in our answers. We enter the dark night of the soul. But these bleak times are intimations of potential breakthroughs in our intimacy with God.

God loves us too much to let atrophy destroy us.

Our attitude is everything and Psalm 84 enunciates a sound principle:

Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee: in whose heart are thy ways.

Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well: and the pools are filled with water.

They will go from strength to strength:

Remember our internal reality becomes our external reality...and a place of discomfort can become a place of comfort.

Peter's been there. He knows the importance of dogged faith and stamina in surviving spiritual crises. He knows spiritual pain + uses it to draw us into the mystery of 'sufferings' in our lives....**but** not in a way we might expect!!!

For, faith can be amazingly counter-intuitive; so in this pressurised situation, the inspired Peter instructs us to :

"... rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

Isaiah (61.3) is on the same track ... in times of grimness ... put on the

'...the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness...'

We must be slow to base all judgement on mere outward appearances. The most active developmental period in a seed's regeneration occurs in the dark of the earth.

It is important to always remember that despite what we may feel, we are never alone.... Peter reminds us to:

Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you....

'The verb is a strong one: pick up everything that is bothering you, everything that is weighing you down, and fling them on God's back. He will carry them. He will be delighted to do so. He loves you...' (N.T Wright).

At some point, with the grace of God, a spirit of humility and a mustard seed faith, we begin to realise that this discontent has its origin in a Divine Discontent. It is the Holy Spirit resynchronising the waywardness and genetic stubbornness of our hearts and thoughts with the heart and mind of God. The God who not only lovingly searched for us but now lovingly searches us. (Ps139)

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You discern my thoughts from afar.
You...are acquainted with all my ways.
Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!*

The unease we experience is nothing to be worried about. It is a divine invitation to Divine Love. Love, indicates that it's time for us to shed fossilised ways of thinking and to break through spirit-shrinking paradigms that impede our journey into God. We constantly need the Holy Spirit's agitation in renewing our minds, transforming our hearts, helping us to recognise and shed attitudes and limiting lies that obstruct the flow of God's passion for us.

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you/us to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you/us.

Our Father- God is too honest and too loving to settle for a mediocre relationship with us.

The Live-in-Love- of the Holy Spirit, increases vital intimacy with God. This Love has an inbuilt dynamic that enables us to grow in the knowledge, love and salvation in Christ Jesus. The Jesus who cries to our Father:

*"I have made your **name** known to those whom you gave me ...for the **words** that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have **received them** and know in **truth** that I came from you..."*

In saying: *'I have made Your Name known'* Jesus signifies that He has shown us who God is and what He is like. He did that by living amongst us as a man. Jesus was/is God among us. He was/is the incarnation of God's very nature/essence among us.

When He says *'I kept them in Your name'* He is telling us that all who believe in Him/live in Him... He keeps....by means of God's own power and presence.

For Jesus is mysteriously in and of the Holy Name's essence and nature...the incarnate "יהוה"

YHVH...YAHWEH...HASHEM...ADONAY....LORD

Hence Paul in Romans drawing on the Prophet Joel (2:32) writes:

*if you confess with your mouth **Jesus is Lord**,..you shall be saved....(for)"whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."*

So we can **now**, with John and with all saints throughout the ages, gloriously re-echo with Jesus, the solid hope and firm assurance that

*'...this is eternal life, that they /WE may **know** You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.' Amen.*