**Lenten Parish Retreat**

*Into the Fire: Driven by the Spirit into the Desert of Transformation*

Prelude: the baptism of Jesus.

”After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil.” (Lk 3,21f; 4,1f)

- Jesus has two natures, human and divine, with no confusion or admixture.

- We have a human nature but we are “partakers of the divine nature” also. We are children of the earth by nature but we are children of God by grace. Our human nature is not destroyed by grace but it is perfected by God’s grace and raised up. We are both flesh and spirit. The fullness of life is in the spirit. The flesh is passing but the spirit is eternal. We are called to live in the Holy Spirit of God.

The Bread of Life discourse, the Holy Eucharist, Jesus tells his disciples that are finding his sayings hard to accept: “Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, “Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” (Jn 6,61-64)

“The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of earthly things. But the one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. Whoever does accept his testimony certifies that God is trustworthy. For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God. He does not ration his gift of the Spirit. The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.” (Jn 3,31-36)

“Hence, now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death. For what the law, weakened by the flesh, was powerless to do, this God has done: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the sake of sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous decree of the law might be fulfilled in us, who live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. For those who live according to the flesh are concerned with the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit with the things of the spirit. The concern of the flesh is death, but the concern of the spirit is life and peace. For the concern of the flesh is hostility toward God; it does not submit to the law of God, nor can it; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh on the contrary, you are in the spirt, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body id dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you.” (Rom 8,1-12)

- flesh or spirit. What is the proper balance? What is the proper order?

1. Into the Fire
   1. The fire of God’s love. God is a consuming fire of love.
   2. 696 Fire. While water signifies birth and the fruitfulness of life given in the Holy Spirit, fire symbolizes the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit's actions. the prayer of the prophet Elijah, who "arose like fire" and whose "word burned like a torch," brought down fire from heaven on the sacrifice on Mount Carmel.37 This event was a "figure" of the fire of the Holy Spirit, who transforms what he touches. John the Baptist, who goes "before [the Lord] in the spirit and power of Elijah," proclaims Christ as the one who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."38 Jesus will say of the Spirit: "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!"39 In the form of tongues "as of fire," the Holy Spirit rests on the disciples on the morning of Pentecost and fills them with himself40 The spiritual tradition has retained this symbolism of fire as one of the most expressive images of the Holy Spirit's actions.41 "Do not quench the Spirit.”42
   3. “On Zion sinners are in dread, trembling grips the impious: “Who of us can live with the consuming fire? who of us can live with the everlasting flames?” He who practices virtue and speaks honestly, who spurns what is gained by oppression, brushing his hands free of contact with a bribe, stopping his ears lest he hear of bloodshed, closing his eyes lest he look on evil - he shall dwell on the heights, his stronghold shall be the rocky fastness, his food and drink in steady supply.” (Is 33,14ff)
   4. “For our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb 12,29)
   5. The Spirit as fire.
   6. The fire of God’s love purifies us, preparing us for union with God. Cleansing us from sin and calling us to holiness and life in the Spirit.
   7. God is courting us for marriage: “So I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart…I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord.” (Hosea 2,16; 21f)
   8. Jesus' temptations: 538 The Gospels speak of a time of solitude for Jesus in the desert immediately after his baptism by John. Driven by the Spirit into the desert, Jesus remains there for forty days without eating; he lives among wild beasts, and angels minister to him.241 At the end of this time Satan tempts him three times, seeking to compromise his filial attitude toward God. Jesus rebuffs these attacks, which recapitulate the temptations of Adam in Paradise and of Israel in the desert, and the devil leaves him "until an opportune time”.242 539 The evangelists indicate the salvific meaning of this mysterious event: Jesus is the new Adam who remained faithful just where the first Adam had given in to temptation. Jesus fulfils Israel's vocation perfectly: in contrast to those who had once provoked God during forty years in the desert, Christ reveals himself as God's Servant, totally obedient to the divine will. In this, Jesus is the devil's conqueror: he "binds the strong man" to take back his plunder.243 Jesus' victory over the tempter in the desert anticipates victory at the Passion, the supreme act of obedience of his filial love for the Father. 540 Jesus' temptation reveals the way in which the Son of God is Messiah, contrary to the way Satan proposes to him and the way men wish to attribute to him.244 This is why Christ vanquished the Tempter for us: "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning."245 By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert.
   9. Will Jesus follow the Spirit or succumb to the temptations of the flesh.
2. Driven by the Spirit (Patty’s part)
   1. The Spirit as guide
3. To be Tempted. Tempted vs. Tested
   1. Temptations: “Blessed is the man who perseveres in temptation, for when he has been proved he will receive the crown of life that he promised to those who love him. No one experiencing temptation should say, “I am being tempted by God”; for God is not subject to temptation to evil, and he himself tempts no one. Rather, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters: all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (James 1,12-18)
   2. The wild beasts of the desert: our human desires.
      1. Sensual pleasure, Egoism, Presumption, Pride, Avoiding all suffering. Testing God. Be careful what you ask for, you may get it. Disordered desires of the flesh.
   3. Desires are good when they are ordered properly through Lenten disciplines. Desire for God in the restless heart. Desire for the things of heaven, for the eternal not the passing.
   4. Testing to strengthen us, purify us, clarify us.
   5. God tests us and tries our hearts. “More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it? I, the Lord, alone probe the mind and test the heart, to reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds.” (Jer 17,9ff)
   6. “Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1,2ff)
   7. “In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1Pt 1,6-9)
   8. Being tested by God is a matter of the heart and for a specific purpose. Understanding why God tests us will empower us not only to endure the tests but find joy in them.
      1. God gives us grace in our testing
4. Transformed by God’s love
   1. “I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Rom 12,1f)
   2. “I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.” (Gal 2,19ff)
   3. “For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God. Among human beings, who knows what pertains to a person except the spirit of the person that is within? Similarly, no one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God. And we speak about them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit, describing spiritual realities in spiritual terms. Now the natural person does not accept what pertains to the Spirit of God, for to him it is foolishness, and he cannot understand it, because it is judged spiritually. The spiritual person, however, can judge everything but is not subject to judgment by anyone. For “who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to counsel him?” But we have the mind of Christ.” (1Cor 2,10-16)
   4. Emerging from the desert of Lent with new strength and purified desire. Along the journey of Lent through the desert we keep running into the same Spirit that drove us into the desert. The Spirit is truth that leads to sorrow and contrition for our sins, the Spirit is mercy that heals the wounds of sin, the Spirit is breath that rises up in prayer and enters into us as inspiration, the Spirit is our brothers and sisters in need that challenge us to compassion and charity, the Spirit is water from the rock that flows from the heart of Christ and refreshes us in our thirst and gives us strength for the journey. The Spirit is an ancient Word or Song that we begin to hear in the silence and that brings joy to our hearts and urges us onward. From the heights of the holy mountain, the Father sees us and looks into the secret places of our hearts and rewards us with a new understanding of who we are meant to be, that we are the children of God and that we are being created anew with a clean and pure heart that is ready to be a dwelling place of the Spirit. As we near the end of our journey, we find that the Spirit is no longer outside of us, driving us on, but that he now dwells within us, guiding us home and promising us peace.
      1. A steadfast faith
      2. A new wisdom for life