Passion(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**:

*“He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God”.*  Jn. 8:46

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 Today is commonly called “Passion Sunday”. Some might be surprised that we did not read the Passion narrative today. But we will do that next weekend for Palm Sunday, and Holy Week has one from each Evangelist.

 Rather, today is called Passion Sunday because of its ancient, original meaning, from the Latin word *passio***:** to be acted upon. We saw this concept of *being acted upon* quite clearly in our Collect for today, as we prayed to be “governed in body and soul” by God.

 Our Gospel has aspects which suggest *being acted upon.* One is very clear, at the end, when people picked up stones to cast at Jesus, or put another way, they were getting ready to...**act upon** him. But, I would like to turn our attention to another aspect of our Gospel and that is the strong lesson it has for us about the Spirit of God.

 Now the Jews of Jesus' day had the belief that the Spirit of God acting within a man helped him appreciate or grasp truth. We see this throughout the Old Testament when one hears that “the Word of God” or “the Spirit of the Lord” came upon someone. Yet, in each case the Spirit of God did not overwhelm someone, but always **asked** to be invited in.

 We might remember that Moses was reticent about going unto the Hebrews until God further had promised that Moses would not have to speak to the multitudes but that his brother Aaron rather would handle that job. We also might remember from Isaiah that when he heard the voice of the Lord wondering whom to send to save Israel, that Isaiah volunteered and said, “Here am I, send me”.

 And, with the Feast of the Annunciation today we might also remember that it was Mary's “**yes**” which enabled the birth of Jesus to proceed. God did not just order the pregnancy upon her.

 Without permission, the Holy Spirit will not operate within someone. We invite Him in to begin His work at baptism. Without giving permission we place a door **in the way** of His operation. The Jews of Jesus day had, unwittingly, placed a closed door in the way of the Spirit of God. In the nearly 600 years since their return from Babylon the Jews finally had gotten past their ancient problem of idolatry.

 To help them keep on the straight and narrow they had fleshed out **substantially** the Ten Commandments. Between the oral teachings recorded in the *Mishnah* and the written rabbinical notes of the *Talmud* the Law had become enormous and ponderous, worthy of modern day Washington, DC. It directed ones behavior in all situations and for seemingly all contingencies, including inclement weather.

 The movement of the Holy Spirit which had written the Law of God in just Ten simple words had been “updated” by replacing it strictly by human reason. The Pharisees each had signed a pledge in front of witnesses to keep the Law to the NTH degree. It reminds me of the same development from our Constitution to our massive statute books today.

 While human reason or logic can prove mighty, it is not any more infallible than the human beings who exercise it. We need to allow for the movement of our spiritual side too in order to keep us from being blinded by our logic.

 A bit like Mr. Spock it is all too easy for us fully human people to make a false or incomplete assumption and quickly be “off to the races”, so to speak. We tragically have seen this problem written large in the case of governments and societies throughout history, especially the last three centuries. This may be because, logically speaking, if a premise is false, then every conclusion can be **true**.

 Ever since the birth of the Enlightenment shortly after the close of the Age of Religious Wars near the end of the Seventeenth Century many people have believed one could and have sought to perfect man and society without God, by just plain reason and science. The Spirit of God, for some reason Him and never the devil, caught all the flack for the previous era's bloody religious wars and the intelligentsia since have been determined not to let THAT ever happen again!

 The result of putting a door in the way of the Spirit of God and strictly following logic has produced the recurrent anomaly of people proclaiming the path to earthly paradise for all men lay in the slaughter of some men. This was on display daily in the French Revolution, and then again many times in the Twentieth Century with the push for... the New Soviet Man, Hitler's Final Solution, and Mao's Cultural Revolution.

 We are not immune from it today even in America with all our, relatively speaking compared to Europe, fairly high Sunday church attendance, post Covid. We may proclaim a trust in God to provide our land with riches and thereby many dollars and coins for copious government purposes, but the schools and buildings built with our logo covered lucre better not offer any prayers of thanks to the One our money itself states we believe is responsible for all that we have. And the Woke are very sure of themselves, in everything.

 The Jews of Jesus day, as with many in modern society today, had, wittingly or unwittingly, placed a door in the path of the operation of the Holy Spirit. They would follow the logic of their teachings to the NTH degree. As a result, truth (Jesus) was **right** before them and yet they neither could appreciate nor grasp it. Neither, we might remember, could Pontius Pilate grasp truth even with Jesus standing right in front of him.

 Yet, we also ought to spend some time during this “Passion-tide” to ponder whether we ourselves have placed any doors in the way of allowing the Spirit to operate within **us**. Are we always busy? 24-7-365?? If we are then something is out of balance in our lives since God did not make us as machines.

 Do we allow, or if necessary MAKE, time even just twice a week for a few minutes of genuine, sedentary, **quality** quiet time where the voice of the Spirit might actually get heard? And, if we do sometimes hear such a voice suggesting action which sounds like something Jesus or a saint might recommend but which is full of risk to our self image and settled life, do we turn away and refuse to listen further?

 We can not be good soldiers of the Cross, as Confirmed Christians are, if we never are in a position to **hear** suggestions and directions from above. Likewise we also are not doing our job if we immediately dismiss any quiet suggestions or directions which do not appeal to **our**... sense of logic.

 Thinking **we** know what is best for our life is what started human problems back in Eden. It is very easy for seemingly sound reasons to put stumbling blocks, doors, in the way of the Holy Spirit operation with-in us. This can make it impossible for Him to...”act upon” us. We thus can be too smart by half and unintentionally come, like the very devout Jews of Jesus' own day, to be... **NOT** of God. Amen.

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