

Where Does the Spirit Go?

A Spiritual Exploration of Life in the Spirit

By Stephen
Kirsch

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
INTRODUCTION	ii
<i>My Journal As I begin this book</i>	ii
<i>And As I end this book</i>	ii
Journaling	iii
The Bible and Other Sources	iii
I Reflection	1
II The Spirit is a'movin'...	4
Scripture Thoughts:	9
PRAYER ACTION:	9
Reflection:	9
III The Spirit of History	10
Scripture Thoughts:	15
PRAYER ACTION:	15
Reflection:	15
IV The Spirit of Crisis	16
Scripture Thoughts:	20
PRAYER ACTION:	20
Reflection:	20
V Life In The Spirit	21
Scripture Thoughts:	26
PRAYER ACTION:	26
Reflection:	26
VI Where the Spirit is	27
Scripture Thoughts:	31
PRAYER ACTION:	31
Reflection:	31

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Finally, I would like to remember *all* the priests, religious and laity (Roman Catholic and otherwise) who have contributed their lives to my faith journey and shown me the Spirit of God's love alive in our world.

“A man’s heart plans out his way but it is the Lord who makes his steps secure.” (Proverbs 17:4)

INTRODUCTION

My Journal As I begin this book

I heard that Fr. Henri Nouwen died this past weekend. I am unable to recount the number of times that his simple book *With Open Hands* has inspired me to reach out, spiritually and physically to others since I first read it swinging in a hammock way back in 1978. Throughout my spiritual formation his works have spoken to me with a gentleness and wisdom. I have decided then, to honor his works here and to also be inspired once more, this time by his death, to write some simple words of my own. This book is a journal of my spiritual musings and insights.

Fr. Nouwen's rich style recalls peace amidst chaos, power within helplessness, conviction in the face of oppression and indecision. How liken to the words of Jesus they are. It is not always an easy message, but it is a good and beautiful one.

Nowadays we call it *angst* and have all sorts of deep thinkers have delved into it, but despair and disconnected-ness, fear and helplessness have always been a part of human existence. Today we have self-help books and science to try to cure what ails us as if we could learn to love through sheer human will. Behind all of these things lies a foundation or backdrop if you will which gives them their only chance of success, the backdrop of Jesus. Jesus presents us with the focus of all our questions and answers. All of our thoughts, all of our works everything in this world rests in Jesus *the firstborn of all creation for through him all things came to be*. When we look beyond the troubles of this world, we see the kingdom of God, with Jesus as its head.

The world itself has no answer. Modern pantheism or New Age, if you will (understanding among other things, God as within nature), limits our view. We never have to look beyond our world or ourselves as God is 'in' this thing next to us, which ultimately means that we can control him. God is much bigger than that. He *encompasses* all of creation. *In him we live and breathe and have our being* (my emphasis). God is greater than the sum of His creation. We see God everywhere because everything is within God -- not the other way around. This keyboard, this desk, this building, this earth, this universe all exist within God, yet is at the same time he is independent of them.

With the Incarnation, we live within God through the Body of Christ. We have a handle on God the Father and God the Son, but *where does the Spirit go?*

The Spirit of God is the connective tissue of the Body of Christ. The Spirit is the wind, which carries the Word from God *across the world not returning to him until it accomplishes the task for which it was sent*. The Spirit moves the Church, not we who are its members. The Spirit of humility and repentance leads to understanding not human intellect. Let us take our own wind from our own sails and let them fill with God's Wind: listen as God listens, speak as Jesus speaks and act as the Spirit acts.

This book has been in formation for about 10 years now. Boy am I finally happy to start to get it out of my system. Thanks especially to my wife Alice, who thought it would be a good idea and that now was the time.

September 1996

And As I end this book

It has taken years of stopping and starting. I wanted to have this book ready within the year of the Spirit as proclaimed by John Paul II, which really inspired its fruition, in anticipation of the millennium, but I guess I'll just have to settle on sometime this Millenium.

Searching for the Spirit to inspire has reshaped some of the parts of this book. Like children sometimes you never know where they will go.

Several people have lent their eyes to this short book and I want to thank them now and forever. That I could share it with them makes it special to me.

Let me end this start with a prayer that was introduced to me many years ago:

"God, unto Whom alle hertes ben open, and unto Whom alle wille spekith, and unto Whom no privé thing is hid: I beseche Thee so for to clense the entent of myn hert with the unspekable gift of Thi grace that I may parfiteliche [perfectly] love Thee, and worthiliche [worthily] preise Thee. Amen." (Opening prayer from *The Cloud of Unknowing*)

September 2000

Journaling

For most folks, an important part of any journey is the pictures you take while you are on it. How fun it is to go through them when they are fresh from the developer (or the desktop). How vivid the memories are and how easily they are refreshed. How eager we are to share those photos with others, to include others in our memories, to let them see the world as we did. Eventually memories fade, but we still have the photographs to take us back on that journey...to bring a small smile to our faces, memories of a different time; a chance to bring forward the joy, making it real in this time.

A useful tool during this process (and afterwards) is a spiritual journal. I usually use one of those small hardbound blank page notebooks you can pick up at any stationary or bookstore, but a spiral notebook works just as well (and as they become more prevalent, a computer or PDA works real well for this too). Think of your journal as a photo scrapbook capable of sparking fresh memories, eliciting a response, and eventually becoming a snapshot of who you were on the road to who you are. The notebook becomes the reference guide of your spiritual growth and journey, something you can refer back to time and time again.

The *prayer action* sections of this book encourage you to write your action and prayer experiences in a journal. This is a useful tool for later reflection. Of course your journal is not limited to the questions and observations of this book, but is a space for all of your spiritual and theological reactions, questions and observations. Who knows, maybe you'll be able to publish it someday?

The Bible and Other Sources

Aside from the scripture reflections at the end of each chapter, this work contains a lot of references to biblical passages (some noted, some paraphrased, some referenced – usually randomly), so it makes sense that along with this book you carry a **Bible** -- one that contains both the New *and* the Old Testaments. In addition, if it is not a 'Catholic' translation (in this case the New American Bible or "NAB") then it also needs the Apocrypha included. The suggested passages are by no means exhaustive and by all ways of encouragement I can muster, read the passages around these to keep them in context (not just the *pericope*). Feel free to jot some of your own favorites in your journal as you go along.

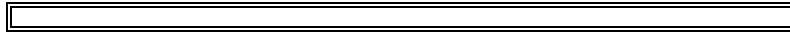
The **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)**. Sometimes the tough questions need a succinct and direct guide. Carry it too, if you would like, but make it a small version. There are also some references to documents from the **Vatican II** Council. A pocket-sized version of that (I prefer the Flannery translation) might also be of use. Of course, for you modern types, these things are all available on-line!

I Reflection

I start this book with a reflection. It seems that most books on spirituality start with some sort of reflection, to set the stage for the work to come. I wanted to make this a personal reflection, for myself and for you the reader. This is not meant to produce a guilt-trip or feelings of unworthiness, but to spark true feelings of humility. On any journey to God we must prepare ourselves, for as the psalmist tells us:

"Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord?
Who shall stand in his holy place?
The man with clean hands and pure heart,
who desires not worthless things" (Ps. 24).

This might sound like a pretty tall order, but to begin you only have to wash your hands. Do not be weighed down by the messages of this section. Try instead to feel the power that comes from understanding, repentance and forgiveness. Become a part of the Revelation/Conversion/Perfection cycle that your baptism immerses you into. Only through understanding our sinfulness and accepting our redemption can we move forward in holiness. [The opposite is to be bound to the slavery of sin that seeks only to destroy us!]



Watercolor painting is perhaps one of the most beautiful forms of painting. I have always envied those who could do it well. In my own attempts, I have found an inability to express internal desires through a mixture of the right amount of water, paint, wash and pressure. Time and time again I become greedy for the painting to be done, for the reed to bend just right in the watercolor wind, to force beauty to appear where none was before. What I end up with has potential beauty and *at least* one flaw.

The real beauty of watercolor lies, I believe, in its softness, the seeming lack of a background. Sometimes the paper appears washed in a color, but still, upon examination, the background of plain white triumphs and shows through. So every time you look at it you see that the sky is not really the background but that something lies just beyond it. The trees are never so thick that all you see is the forest; that even the most solid of rocks or quickest of streams remains suspended above something else.

When I look at the picture of my life, what background do I see? Have I tried to completely cover over the background, so that only I shine, and nothing shines through me? Have I tried to surround myself with things that will fill in the voids in the background, in an attempt to highlight myself or cover what is the foundation of my life? We can often look at a painting and say "*that is just too cluttered; wouldn't it be nicer if this and that object were less pronounced, lighter?*" but we are unable to look at ourselves and say the same thing.

I am at times unable to allow the background to shine through, or to see that there is something more beyond me. Strengthen me to have the courage to be humble.

The problem with being human is that we only get one first chance. We as individuals have never had to do even the simple things we do every day before, at least not in exactly the same context. I have reacted one way in the past but is that a proper or sufficient reaction now? Which experiences do we need and which should we discard? I may be the father of three children and have experienced fatherhood for each child but this is my first time for being a father of three, as it was for two or one. And they keep changing! The things I did yesterday with them are not the things I will do today. We will eat together as we do everyday, but the circumstances will be different than any other time that we have eaten together. We will

each be different people at dinner than we were at breakfast (and hopefully in a better mood). People have experienced Jesus for 2000 years, but I have only experienced him for some 40 odd.

With this human limitation, how do I respond to God today? Do I take my relationships one day at a time? Am I worried that 'we don't pray like we used to' when in reality I am not praying like I should? How much do I rely on the daily presence of God as opposed to the exact replication of previous experiences of Him? We are often quick to criticize the Mass or a prayer service as boring or not fulfilling because we are not trying to find ways to renew and refresh our praise within it.

I am unable at times to learn from the past but merely try to repeat it. Redemption shows me that there is a beyond to the status quo. Help me seek forgiveness for the past, put it behind me, work for today and feel hope for the future.

Unlike oils or acrylics, once watercolor paint is applied to the canvas, it cannot be easily covered over. Even after it dries, attempts to paint over it will cause it to bleed into the new color. Once we enter the world we have an effect on it. Things will never be the same. So it is with God, especially in Jesus.

This world is God's creation and our part in that creation is important. At the end of the day I am unable to shed the world from my back like clothing. Some of us are able to turn our backs, close our eyes and ears to the world. Most of us though do not turn our backs, or close our eyes and ears, we just let them become overwhelmed by the world. We become as a baby confronted with too much stimulus. Our limbs cease to move or else they flail about beyond our control. Our eyes become fixed and staring, and by seeing everything, seeing nothing. Sounds cease to follow the ear canal to our brains. We reject any incoming information. We sin 'in what I have done and what I have failed to do.' God's will, his desire for us to be our best, can get lost because we choose to block it. We can block its growth with a forest of noise and activity. Sometimes we put so much emphasis on the world that we think we have found God in his creation, and we fail to find him in our hearts. We have created God in our image of Him rather than being his creature.

There are times that I do not hear the call, fail to live life, through all of the beautiful foreground noise of life. Lord, open my ears, eyes and heart to hear you through the noise.

We begin to live when we come to see that there is no such thing as Fate. When we become responsible for our actions, and not blame sources around us, we become truly powerful. Jesus could have blamed the crowds when the High Priest confronted him; "It wasn't me...they choose to proclaim me King!" but instead he took responsibility for his message: *even these stones will shout* should their voices be silenced.

We might protest that he was lucky: he had the Spirit behind him. He knew he was right, that he was doing God's will. After all he was both God and Man; we are just mere humans. Nothing could be further from what God has revealed to us. We too are the *image* and the *likeness* of God Himself! God did not create a one-dimensional being. He did not create a being that was separate from him. He has created us to be like him, as he created no other beings or objects. He breathed his life into us as for no other creation. Jesus ultimately reveals this to us. Jesus prayed and wept in the garden; was that just human weakness? No. Through our fears and sins we can hide God's nature within us and try to label it 'human nature', but Jesus shows us that our human nature is the divine nature. God is never far away, no matter how we may try or think we have distanced ourselves from Him. As Jesus did, we too can see God's will and feel the Spirit inspire us to holiness.

At times I am unable to see the power of God's Spirit I have within me, provided by my nature as God created it and as Jesus has revealed it to me.

What is the thing that can draw me beyond myself? When I am tired and the day has been tough, and even if I smiled all day long to strangers, I find it easiest to come home and be rude and mean and thoughtless and selfish and whiny to those I love, and who love me unconditionally. Perhaps I feel that these people will accept me unconditionally and I no longer need to be nice. How much pain can I cause those I love in order to ease those I just know? Patience seems to be a virtue I have long since released.

What can help me to release the anger, the fatigue, and the thoughtlessness? How can I stop to pray for patience when I need it right now? When will I find the time to hear Wisdom speak to me? What will I have to release in order to be the best parent, husband, lover, prayer, friend, brother, worker, minister?

The choice to be *like* God, true to our nature as the image and *likeness*, frees us, but requires action as God would do. If we are like Him then we are like Him in love. The fruits of eternal life surround us, we reach inside to pick them but we must reach outside of ourselves to share them.

For the times when I am tired and I need to hear the gentle silence and wisdom of the Spirit, Lord hear me.

II The Spirit is a'movin'...

Perhaps it is odd that this book is titled for the Spirit and yet the Spirit has really not been mentioned. Exploring our lives, meeting Jesus, reflecting on God's revelation, seeing the effects of our sinfulness in the world and the power of God's love to offset it, helps us to not only see the Spirit of God but to see the action of the Spirit in the world. Then we can see that since the Spirit is God's action in the world everything in Creation talks about the Spirit.

This book is a reflection about control or more correctly, it is a reflection about letting go. We spend a lot of our lives trying to take control. We buy clocks and alarms, save money in bank accounts, make vacation plans and retirement decisions, set goals and standards. We spend very little time letting go of that control. That is not to say that we should spend more time being carefree and irresponsible but that we actually have very little control no matter how hard we plan. It is amazing how quickly days, months even years of planning can unravel and come crashing down in a single moment. That, I suppose, is why we have to spend so little time at letting go. It does not matter how tight a grip you think you have on the reins, if the leather is old and crumbles then all you have hold of is dust. It can break no matter where you hold it and if old cartoons imitate life, always somewhere outside of your grip and ability to recover. Rodeo riders lose their seating depending on how tightly they are holding on to the reins or how much hope and significance they place on them.

Extending the rider metaphor, think of yourself as the rider, the reins as the plans you make and the horse as God, or if you will God's plan for you. The reins are really just for guiding or communicating your desires to the horse. They are only a part of riding a horse. If you depend on the reins more than you depend upon the way your knees grip the horse, or if you are lucky enough to have a saddle your feet sit in the stirrups, then you'll go one way as the horse goes the other. Maybe this metaphor loses some steam when you look at bronco riding, though I have seen many men unable to let go of the rope after they fell off only to be drug about by the horse. In my mind, sometimes the horse knows the better way to go. And trust me if you have never ridden, a horse knows if you know where you are going or not. Either way it is always a partnership between the horse and the rider.

If I make plans, expect that they might change, be willing to adapt and go on without worrying about if the outcome matches my plans or not then I have stepped into God's hands. Perhaps the lesson is that we need to spend as much time planning as letting go if worry is what drives us to plan. Control questions are very insidious. I once knew of a woman who had planned out the birth of her child in between two other events, certain that the child would cooperate with her schedule (and I assume if not, she would force it). I think she saw the birth as a bump in the road, a mere sidetrack to the daily routine, unlike the life altering event it is. You may laugh, but think about the last time that you had a flat tire. What effect did that have on your schedule? Had you bothered in the past x years to check the tire pressure in the spare? What kind of plan did you have in place to handle it? How can we truly understand the effects an event (even the smallest) will have in our lives? If we did would we do things differently? The best lesson we need to learn from trying to take control of our life then is: plan wisely. Control is not discipline, and we are disciples. Life then, is not a case of planning for the worst and hoping for the best but of laying the correct groundwork wherein our best hopes will be realized no matter what happens.

This act of trying to retain control of the things we cannot control is the act of trying to be sufficient in ourselves. This is the sin of Adam and Eve. This is to block the life giving power of God in us (*Jeremiah 2:11-13*). Life can become very random and chaotic especially when we seek what we think is 'total freedom' or total control that will totally free me from worry, right? There is a hard lesson to be learned in allowing one's self to be *interdependent*, through self-discipline and responsibility, as opposed to *independent* through inflexible control or irresponsible freedom. We will never have complete control over our lives because we are not static beings. If we were static beings then control would be possible, but like children, once we learn one lesson we are already growing beyond that lesson. At best we can only guide, and be guided. We are disciples (*Thomas Merton*).

Being a disciple means having a discipline that goes way beyond control. Control is static but discipline is dynamic. In the beginning of the movie *Shadowlands*, based on the life of C. S. Lewis and partially on his books *Surprised by Joy* and *A Grief Observed*, we are shown a series of lectures given by Mr. Lewis

wherein he presents the same spiritual antidote over and over again. Every group responds well since they have never heard that message, but Lewis grows stale. That is, until one day when he is challenged to step beyond the static event in his life which led him to that conclusion, and begin to evaluate things in a dynamic way. He becomes surprised by Joy, which he thought he already possessed. In that same way we talk about someone who is 'living in the past' or 'reliving past glories'. We acknowledge that life is dynamic yet we cling to a static view, believing that is where security lies. Sometimes tired old words can provide comfort, but only because we see them in a new light. The point is not to forget about security but to seek out the correct source of security.

Simply put, discipline is the Christian understanding of the secular concept of control. Salvation/Redemption is the Christian understanding of the secular concept of freedom.

We can drown in our desire for control and the perceived freedom it will give us. Teenagers long for the day they will separate from their parents and be 'free' and 'in control' of their lives. We/they spend our time looking forward to the day that will never arrive. When we walk out our parents' door to become adults we discover that the limits become self-imposed, in addition to those which are imposed by outside forces. The earlier we begin to discover and follow self-imposed limits the sooner we will discover true freedom, or to use another word, mature. There are decisions forced upon us, but rarely are we the victims of outside forces. The decisions we make prior to that moment of 'forced decision' often are the basis for the limited choices later on and are often the cause for the forced decision. If I choose to do something indiscriminately or without reflection, then someday I will have to live with the consequences of that action, and the limitation it places on my choices (therein lies the beauty of Redemption; look on it in light of the Garden of Eden story).

Spiritual maturity, like emotional maturity is not static. To say one is mature is not to say that person has arrived, but is to say that person has reached a level of responsibility. Understanding our limits and powers helps to show us our place in the world. But maturity is more than an understanding; maturity is the acting out of that understanding. That understanding must develop throughout our lifetimes. I am no longer the svelte young powerful boy that I used to be, or at least believed myself to be. I no longer live out my fantasies through external things like GI Joes or cars. I, like Paul, have had to learn to *put away the things of a child*, to find the power within myself and not within powerful toys. I have had to learn to laugh at myself not through self-deprecating humor but through a genuine humility. I have had to learn to deal with my limits using the powers I have, to accomplish the things that I can accomplish. That is maturity. The level of maturity I show is the level I at which I have learned to let go of those external expressions of myself and do those things which come from within me.

As I change physically, it affects who I am. As I change though, I carry with me previous understandings of myself, hence my desire to turn a cartwheel because at one time 'I used to do it all the time'. Some understandings are baggage but some are true expressions of maturity. Spiritual maturity is the same. My experiences grow and I learn what works and what does not. I must learn to discard the baggage that I do not need and I must learn to be sufficient in God (*2 Corinthians 4:5 – 18?*).

The level at which I am unable to let go of those things that hinder my expression of myself is the level of my immaturity. If I refuse to learn from my mistakes, or deny that things I do are immature then my ability to grow is severely limited. Letting go of the baggage, letting go of the blame, letting go of the pettiness, the greed, the sorrow, and ultimately the fear -- therein lies maturity. The level at which I am able to take responsibility for myself is the level of my maturity. As Mike Patin, the great speaker and youth minister said, *we cannot always control which situations life hands us but we can always control how we respond to them*. Sometimes there are situations or events in our lives that seem beyond our power to deal with. Fortunately, thank God – literally – we are not alone. Spiritual maturity also takes into account how much power God has placed within us. If we only understand ourselves in terms of our world, that is if we only rely upon emotional maturity, then we limit ourselves to only half of our nature. We return to, as I said above, the sin of Adam and Eve. Built in my understanding of myself is an understanding of the nature of God.

Still, our full nature is not God's. We are humans; he is the Creator/Redeemer/Advocate, we the created. As with the flaw in my watercolor painting, human created things contain flaws, only what God creates is perfect. Because of pride, fear, and selfishness, we have limitations, and because of our sinfulness, our ultimate limitation is death (again cf. the Garden story Gn 2). Even when God became human, because he

was also fully human, death was still able to put a claim on Jesus (albeit not a final claim). Death, above all things, is probably the most immovable force in our lives. When we run headlong into it, we lose because our mass is always smaller. Jesus, with the help of the Spirit transforms death (*Romans 8:11?*); and by it our very nature is changed: *Our old nature was nailed to the cross with him* Paul tell us (*Romans 6:6*). With the world, death ends everything; with God, death changes everything. God tells us how death can take us beyond ourselves. Death then, like all responsibilities, both limits and empowers us.

We Christians believe that Life extends in a line before our physical birth and after our physical death. One reason we conclude this is we can see it in the many spiritual, emotional and intellectual births and deaths we face every day. The patterns of birth, life and death that exist within our lives are the patterns that exist within the world and all of human history. Patterns help guide us. Patterns may seem to be static items, but that is not the case. We say things like: *We can always rely on her to come through*; to rely does not imply certainty; *One thing about him is that you always know what he'll say or do*; like any good stereotype, it has its use and its limitation. And, like any good stereotype, there always comes a time when it can be disproved. Death is the end of the pattern. There is nothing else that matches it; it is the last link in the chain of mortal life.

Death and God provide the backgrounds for the modern understanding of life. Most modern thinkers can be divided between the Life-In-Death school and the Life-In-God school. When death is the defining moment or principle of life (*i.e. the Life-In-Death school*) then *live fast, die hard and leave a good looking corpse* is the motto (though I think that it usually ends up that you just live hard and die fast, or *it ain't always the years, usually it's the mileage*). When God is the defining principle then *love one another as I have loved you* is the motto. Which do we choose as the basis for our lives? Which will drive our emotional and spiritual development? In a culture so prevalent in death, where is God? Why does such a culture exist when so many profess a belief in a world that is just the opposite of this one, based on the Christian ideal? If Jesus is *the Way, the Truth and the Life* why is that not enough? I have often argued with a friend of mine, Jack Tisdale, about which is the most important (or defining) event for Christians. I maintain that it is the Resurrection while he argues that it should be Pentecost (I now lean toward perhaps a middle ground -- that the Resurrection is the most important for Christians spirituality and Pentecost is the most important for the life of Christians [Church]). He has a good point because Jesus gave us his Spirit and the Spirit is *the giver of life* (*Nicean Creed*). But I digress....

Modern scientists and social scientists, to explain the world quickly and factually, use models and patterns. They may not fully explain the why but they approximate the how. For the Judeo-Christian the model or pattern is the faithfulness of God. Time and time again throughout human history God has reached out to us and presented us with the means to be truly free, and in control of our lives. God's Spirit acts within human events to place God's love and wisdom within our grasp. So too, God reaches into our lives and acts to place His love in us and into His world. But it is still a pattern: we know *what* God will do but we do not know *how* he will do it. That also implies that even though it is given we do not always take it. To understand this is to be able to let go of some control -- we cannot control God, either by our prayers or our love. God will always be faithful to us but we cannot *make* him be faithful to us by our own actions, power or will.

We can have a tendency as Christians to concentrate solely upon the Son, and pay only lip service to the Father and the Spirit. But then our Gospel is not a Gospel of the Spirit but *the Gospel of Jesus Christ* and after all, aren't we Christians and not Spiritians (or Pneumatians?). Jesus provides us with an intimate, personal God. We can, like Thomas, put our fingers into the nail holes in his hand and into the wound in his side. Even if we struggle in our faith sometimes, Jesus is a figure in human history as solid and as accessible as George Washington. God the Father at least is chronicled in the Hebrew Scriptures, present within the human history he created; he speaks to and physically intervenes in the process of his people. While (perhaps) slightly less accessible than Jesus the Son, the Father still presents an involvement that has been attested to by Scripture and that we can account for in the physical world around us. The Spirit is inferred in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Gospels. For most though, our understanding is linked to his appearance on Pentecost, flamboyant, bright, unavoidable. After that he seems to fade into the background as the great deeds of men like Peter, Philip, James and Paul, again characters we can really set our reality teeth into, rise to the forefront of Scripture and our minds.

It is just a general fact: people find it hard to follow something that cannot be seen. We can all confess to this at one time or another in our lives. As when looking at the watercolor painting, we often just do not concentrate on the background because it does not appear to be part of the image. Its blankness holds no

information for us. What we forget is that the artist left the background the way it was. He or she does not try to hide what the brush leaves exposed; the artist is attempting to tell us something: that there is information contained therein and that exposed background is integral to the overall painting. Thus it is with God. Without the God's Spirit the world would never have come to be (*Genesis 1*). Without the Spirit there would be no Incarnation (*Luke 1:35*). Without the Spirit the great deeds of Jesus' disciples would never have happened (*Luke 24:49; John 7:39; Acts 1ff*). The Father creates using the Son (*Word*) who is carried upon the Spirit (*Breath*) (*Genesis 1, John 1*).

The Father is the Artist of Creation, the Son is the Paint and the Spirit is the Paper and Brushes, the materials by which the artist realizes the painting. The glory of the artist shows through in his choice of color, content and composition. The masterpiece glorifies the artist by constantly pointing back to him (how easily we recognize the artist from the style or content of the painting even before seeing the name). Thereby the Father glorifies the Son as the Son in turn glorifies the Father (*John 17*). We can see God's hand in every bit of Creation. But the artist must also carefully choose his media. The wrong foundation combined with even the best medium will end in failure, as ironically, the deterioration of Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* shows us. The Son promises and the Father gives the Spirit who then gives meaning to and foundation for the work of the Son, glorifying the Father.

We, his greatest creation, also reflect that glory. When we live as his creation, we show his glory because it shines within us and through us. We are *temples of the Holy Spirit*. We must understand something about ourselves to understand God and we must understand something about God in order to understand ourselves. Letting God shine through us is our greatest task on earth.

[Looking back over this, I feel that I should get some semantics out of the way. When we speak of 'God' we are talking about the Trinity. One 'God', three 'Persons'. Earlier spiritual writers speak of the 'Godhead' when identifying the mystery that we also refer to as 'God'. This is because there can be a confusion when using the term 'God'. Often the term 'God' is used to speak of the Father alone, 'God' is the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit – God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. Early heresies confused this as well so the term 'Godhead' appeared to distinguish this sense of 'God' from the three individual 'Persons'. 'God' is the idea, if you will, or better yet it is another word for Trinity. So when we say 'God', think 'Trinity'. This mystery is confusing and complex, but it is no less true. Creator, Redeemer and Guide/Advocate; 'God' is all these things within 'God'.]

So how do we understand God? Technically speaking, we Roman Catholics are Trinitarians. We *preach a Christ crucified* but we profess belief in *God, the Father Almighty, in Jesus Christ his only Son* and in *the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life* (*Nicean Creed*). Understanding the dynamic of the Trinity is a part of being Christian. Whole Church Councils and Schisms have been fought over Trinitarian doctrine. Where do you and I fit into these deep theologies and pitched battles?

In matters of faith, which is looking at it from a strictly living-faith-daily basis, we must decide how to embrace and live the Trinity. The Trinity is not always just a matter for discussion or contemplation; the Trinity is a platform for conversion of heart and action in the world. The greatest truth of any study of God is that theology is only valid when lived.

In the Creed we say the Spirit is *Lord of life* (one who has power over life and death) and *Giver of Life* (one who has the power and means to make life be). In that sense we can see in the Spirit both the Father (*Creator* or *Giver of Life*) and the Son (our Savior the *Lord Jesus Christ*). Jesus sends *his* Spirit out upon the Apostles when he appears to them in the upper room. He promises the *Father's* Spirit to his followers. The Spirit is God as both Father and Son are God. We must recognize the Spirit as both God and a person of the Trinity, a living person within the Godhead. In our daily lives it is the Spirit who carries our prayers to Jesus who, in turn, presents our prayers to the Father; then it is the Spirit who carries out the answers to those prayers; that is, we pray *to* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Spirit (*Fulgentius of Ruspe*).

This Trinity is by no means an easy mystery to penetrate. Centuries of exploration and theology have brought us to where a lifetime of seeking brought St. Thomas Aquinas, quietly contemplating the wonder of it. Part of letting go, as Thomas shows us, is the embracing of mystery, delighting in its dynamic and surprising nature, standing silent in our awe of its wonder both within us and without us.

God the Father, the God of Creation, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, is a God of wonders. The Psalmists remind us of this time and time again. The authors of the Torah, the Wisdom Books, the Prophets and the Historical Books constantly sing praises of his might, glory, power, compassion, discipline, justice,

his presence and most importantly his covenant with us. The Incarnation of God as Jesus presents a picture of God even more wonderful than that presented in the Old Testament (if that is possible). A God so other than us (*my ways are not your ways nor are my thoughts your thoughts*) should become one with us (*became flesh and pitched his tent among us*). We are the image and the likeness of God, but in Jesus, God *humbled himself and took the form of a slave* to be as like us as we can be to him. God shares himself with us in and through our creation and nature and then shares himself even deeper in his Incarnation. What more could we want? Apparently from our actions, something else.

God comes to us where we are. The Bible is full of this. Again and again we fall away from his love and his commitment to us. Again and again he returns with even a deeper covenant with us. He seems to know that sometimes no matter how much he gives us it is never enough for us. After sharing fully with us in our humanity, as if being permanently attached in an even deeper way was not enough, he remains within and around us in his Spirit. Previous to Jesus, he created us and was *imminent* to us and now after entering into our temporal and corporeal history, he is *intimate* with us. God the Son walked in our pain and joy. God the Spirit permeates our pain and our joy. The Spirit speaks for us in *groanings which words cannot express* (*Romans 8:26-27*).

The Spirit is the background of our life's painting. The Spirit moves within, behind, around, and through our world and us. Nothing is without the Spirit, but recognizing that presence and allowing it to move through us is not always easy. The Spirit is the glory of God that peeks through the brush strokes of our actions, binds together the elements of our composition, and colors the nature of our thoughts. Releasing control of our fears, our limits and our failures, frees us to be open to the presence of God within us. If we keep our hands clutched close to our breast then the light within us will be covered and small.

So we let go and let God's light, his Spirit, shine through us, from within us. By understanding God and ourselves we can see that God is very much at the center of who we are. When God becomes the foundation of our life we become truly grounded in ourselves. By relying on God we begin to rely on what God has put within us, the gifts given us by God. We become disciples of God, disciplining ourselves to rely only on his gifts as demonstrated by his Son and given to us by his Spirit; not controlling or being controlled but living free and holy. The first step.

Scripture Thoughts:

Foundations: Matthew 6:19-21,24-34; Mark 1:15; Matthew 12:28-37; Psalm 1; James 4:13-17

Human Nature: Genesis 1:26-31, 2:7; Psalm 103:14-16; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Mystery of the Trinity: Genesis 1:1-2:4; John 1:1-3,10-11,14,32-34

PRAYER ACTION:

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, giver of life and wisdom, breathe life and wisdom into my daily actions. Stand with me through trials and triumphs so that I may stand as a light to the Gentiles and be the glory of your people Israel (Lk). Help me to remember the peace and assurance that comes with your presence.*

Action: Find a place to meditate on the background of life, open your journal. Look closely at the details of the place you have chosen and record them. Examine what details drew you to this place, and see if those details exist in your life or are 'missing' from your life. Do the same for the details that make it difficult for you to concentrate. See if those distractions exist in your life. Ask yourself if you invent them or not. Change the things you can and ignore or incorporate the things you cannot. A dog that barks in the distance can either destroy the mood or can enhance it. Decide how to incorporate one thing into your meditation that is a distraction in your life but is beyond your control to change.

Write down your observations.

Reflection:

III The Spirit of History

We are told that to forget the past means to be doomed to relive it. As Christians we depend heavily on a past to define what we are in the present. As we are also told, we can only see the future because we are perched on the shoulders of all who have gone before us.

When we see God within us we become more able to see Him without us (*double meaning intended*). The God within us is bound to us in our moment of history. Yet our moment or our fears or our beliefs are not a boundary of the God without us -- he is the God of History. The Spirit's ability to work in History is unbounded. The Spirit's ability to work in and through us during this moment in time is only limited by our own barricades. Bending our will to the will of God is not the Spirit's task, but rather our life's task. God is larger than this moment in time yet our moment in time is paramount to him (*Lk. 12:6-7*).

Ours is not the first generation to predict the end of time. Ours is not the first century to see ourselves as having the power to preserve or destroy our world. The Babylonians, the Huns, the Plague, the Millennium, the Bomb; our recorded history is filled with stories of doom, gloom and hope. The Scriptures, filled with such stories, are a codified, recorded history of our relationship with God. Our scriptures chronicle the God of History who is not just the God of human history but of *all* history. Vatican II challenges us to broaden our view of God's action, that salvation is *for all* and *for all time* (*LUMEN GENTIUM 2; 12-13; 60a; DEI VERBUM 8; AD GENTES 3b; 5; 7*). When we reflect back upon the lives of the saints of history, we are able to trace the power of God through all of recorded human history. Starting with the Creation, moving through Abraham and Moses to people like Detrich Bonhoffer, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mother Teresa, we can feel the breath of the Spirit stirring the human heart to do the great things using the smallest of tools and in the face of seemingly great opposition.

I think we fight a battle of *then* and *now*. *Then* was just a moment ago or at least seems like it. I've come to the decision (one I'm sure that has been reached by many parents before me) that I'm not getting any older my kids are just growing up. How can my oldest be 20 when I still feel like I'm 19? *Then* just wasn't that long ago. We barely get a glimpse of *then* much less understand it, when it is gone. Only through reflection *now* of *then* are we able to make sense of the moments right up to *now*. Moreover, by that time, *now* has become *then* and the reflection has to start all over again. Plato tells us Socrates said that *the unexamined life is not worth living*; but then the fully examined life would leave us no time for living.

Since we cannot all spend all of our time in contemplation, we humans have developed a sophisticated set of tools for dealing with life. From our basic 'instincts' that tell us fight or flight without deep thought to the much better developed tools like cliché's, paradigms and stereotypes. Experiences and situations from our past teach us behavior for the future.

The process that has developed this use of 'thought templates', if you will, is in my mind the direct result of the *then/now* struggle. Stereotypes, assumptions, paradigms, prejudices, and preconceived notions; we have so many words for this thinking, from so many languages, that it must be a very deeply human action; so deeply human that in fact we do not even notice it in our daily lives. There are certain times in our lives when the quick judgment of ourselves and others become painfully obvious but the majority of times it is not obvious or painful but very useful. Stereotypes are like all things: their good or harm comes from how we use them. I have to make sense quickly of the daily barrage of information, the call for immediate action or reaction. Yet when used for final decisions, about people, actions or events, the limitation of such thinking comes out. If I choose to make a final judgment about someone based on external indications such as color, dress, religious beliefs, or such, then the loss is mine when I fail to receive what the Spirit of God in that person can offer me.

Consider these to be control and planning thought processes instead of conclusions. Letting preconceptions guide us is one thing; to let them rule us is another. I might believe I can order and control my world by including or excluding based on the limited *past* experiences I have had, even those I have not had (or taken) the time to evaluate them. This does not work because there is no room for the *now* to change or enhance that past experience precisely because I refuse to take the time to let that happen. To love one's enemy means to forgive the past and focus on the present interaction, *and* to forgive any slight or

hurt up to *seventy time seven times* by turning *the other cheek* because even those new offenses too are the past.

We must recognize the presence of God not only then, but now. We must seek him not only in the world around us, in people who seem great and beyond us but also within us. John cries out in the desert with the prophet's voice to *prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths*: in essence make it easy for all to see real the presence of God. As previously stated, the Father and Jesus can seem distant and unreachable. How easy is it to picture Jesus in the throes of pimples or discontent and doubt? Paul tells us that *he was like us in all things but sin*. How can we not identify with him? History seems to place a lot of space between those who live greatness and 'the rest of us'. George Washington is dead and we still struggle to understand the man in the myth only a mere two hundred years hence. This is true of all that have lived and died, but it is not true of Jesus. *Touch me and see* Jesus tells his friends (*Matt 24:36-43*). Jesus is with us at this moment, in a body which we have trouble comprehending. A body that eats but does not seem to need nourishment, one that is cut but does not bleed or feel pain, that is dead but is alive.

Jesus is as alive now as he was in Jerusalem and as he has been for all time. *He has not left us orphans*; nor *will he let his beloved know decay*. God has been, is and will be. In the Spirit we can feel the presence of Jesus and the power of the Father. When we remember or reflect on the past, we make it present *now* and it becomes part of the *now* more so than any other memory because we are using *now*. Jesus remains with us now because calling or re-calling him places him *in our midst*.

That is to say, time is immaterial. *A thousand years are like a day and a day is like a thousand years* to God, so they are to us as well. *All time belongs to Christ and all the ages* (*Easter Vigil*). The moment of consecration at every Mass *is* the moment of consecration at the Last Supper. The Kingdom of God is a mystical place, where, like the Trinity, the mystery of time is accepted with faith. Time then, is no boundary for us, as it is not for God. We do not have to worry about how long something will take, merely participate in it. When my youngest was a five-year-old she always started Mass with the same question: 'When will it be over?' I always told her 'When it is done.' How much truer can you be? When will the end of the world be? When it is over. Who knows? God knows. Do we know all that God knows? No. Do we need to? No. Do we need to trust God that things will happen in their time? Yes. *For everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heavens* (*Eccle. 3:1-8*). *Do not worry about what you are to eat or to wear because who, by worrying can add a single moment to their lives* (*Matt. 6:25-34*)?

The following are reflections on the God of History. By no mean exhaustive or even in-depth, they are some musings on places God has been, places to learn from God and inspirations on where to search for God. Use them to examine your own experiences of God's active Spirit in your life.

Points in History:

CREATION

Here is the first place where we can see and know the Spirit. Here is the *Spirit* of God. In the Old Testament, the word we translate as Spirit is used to describe the action or force of God *in the world* (*Genesis 1:1*). It means something that is lasting and powerful, mysterious, penetrating and completely beyond any human power *or control*. It is not always a powerful wind but it carries great power, as in the story of Elijah at the cave (*1 Kings 19:9-13*). [This *Spirit* is like X-rays which invisibly surround us and can penetrate solid objects yet does not destroy them. The Spirit is everywhere and can expose even our most inmost thoughts.]

The Spirit does God's bidding now. *Lord, send out your spirit and renew the face of the earth* (*Psalms*); *Lord, Send your Spirit upon these gifts that they might become for us the Body and Blood of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ* (*Eucharistic Prayer*); *...God, your Spirit made us your Children* (prayer for 19th Sunday). The Spirit makes real the presence of God in our time in every moment of creation: as the physical world around us: every flower that blooms, every child born; as Jesus: as his physical body and blood both in Israel and on the altar. The creative power of God never leaves us. The Spirit transports it to this world, *yesterday* and *today* (*marking the candle at the Easter Vigil*).

God remains active in His Creation, present in good times and bad. He walks and talks with his creation even when they separate from Him. *What are moments of creation and separation in your own life?*

EXODUS

Through Moses God tells the Israelites that God is bigger than all of the events they have experienced. He is beyond their understanding and it is not their role to try to understand him. *Suffice it to say*, He tells them, *that I AM and that I made all that is and that I AM responsible for all that is happening*. The *Spirit of God is upon* them. What they must understand is that *if I am your God and you are my People*, then you will live and think like that fact is true. They must be his people not their own. The people agree to learn, understand, take into their hearts and live all that God has told them. Then they agree to pass that wisdom and knowledge onto their children, to keep God's presence alive within them. They agree that all God has done for them in the past is important for their very existence at that moment as well as their future. This is so true that they will remember it every year until the end of time. God then comes with unfailing devotion to be with his people and shares himself with them (*Numbers 11:17,25*). If they remember their promise God will always be with them. Even then, it is not easy for His people; they lose sight of God and his powerful Spirit among them, and they fall away. They lose his protective and comforting love because they lose their way and cannot seem to journey back to find it. *What are some of the journeys you have taken? What did you carry with you to keep your focus on the reason for that journey?*

EXILE

The Prophets are one of the best examples of human *now* and *then* expressions of God's presence. In Jeremiah 29:4-15, God tells his people to live here and now but be ready for God to call them back the whole time they are in exile. The prophets don't tell us about a time to come, they tell us about the here and now which pre-figures the time to come. When God tells Hosea to marry Gomer the prostitute He tells us what it must feel like to be Him. Every time a prophet speaks I can hear God saying, "*Now you know how I feel!*" Every time Jeremiah is beaten and spit upon and cast out for speaking God's word, God is saying, "*See what happens to me?*" Jesus himself rebukes us for our treatment of God's dynamic movement in our world ('*you killed the prophets*', *Matthew 23:37*). Yet God is so much a part of this world, he must, like Jeremiah, seek us out again and again even in rejection because his love for us *burns like a fire in his heart* (*Jer. 20:9*). Jeremiah himself echoes this as he begs God to understand and not let him suffer because God has suffered so long (*Jer. 15:15*).

Isaiah speaks of sin and redemption for a people on the edge of total rejection. The exile we feel from sin is always relieved when we come home to God. The Spirit leads us in our wanderings, even though they are wanderings of our own making, because God will never abandon us. As for the exiles, when we seek God with our whole being the Spirit leads us home to God. We find ourselves within God. *When was a time that you exiled yourself from God or others? How did God or the other find you or you back to them again?*

INCARNATION

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you (Luke 1:35). The Incarnation is not an event of the past, and I don't think that the Gospel writers saw it that way, especially in John's *Prologue* (also Isaiah/Luke: *the Spirit of the Lord is upon me*). The power of the Incarnation is the power of Creation. Like Creation it is the gift that keeps on giving. In this way, every time one receives Communion the Incarnation happens again. *Let your Spirit come upon these gifts, to make them holy, that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The Spirit comes upon us and the power of God *overshadows* us. We become not who we are but who we should be. Creation, Incarnation and Salvation take place again within us and we *go out to love and serve the Lord*. We, through the power of the Spirit become one body: the body of Christ, sons and daughters of God. *Think of a time that you made Christ present again to the world in a real and physical way.*

ACTS

Going out and serving the Lord is a difficult task. Without the Spirit, the apostles hid. Even though the day before they stood with Jesus himself, after his death, they cowered. The Spirit brings (quick, what are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit?) peace (*Lk 24:36; Jn 20:21-22*), wisdom, knowledge, fortitude, perseverance, and fear of the Lord, the ability to speak to others in the language of love and forgiveness so that they understand. And with the gifts come the fruits (again, and quickly...), charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, long suffering, faithfulness and humility. With the coming of the promised Spirit, the Church begins. The Apostolic age brings the foundations on which the Church will survive and thrive. The gifts and fruits of the Spirit are both the sign and the tools of the early Church. Without the

Spirit, we would not be God's creation, His children; there would be no Resurrection, no Church. *How have I allowed my Baptism and Confirmation to change my life?*

CHURCH

The Church is the dynamic power of God in the world to bring salvation, to bring not only the news of God's love, but that love itself. In Acts, Luke tells us the story of Gamaliel before the Sanhedrin (*Acts 5:17-42*) where he warns caution when dealing with the new movement because *if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God*. Because the Church has survived we take it as a sign that God's Spirit is with us.

It may not always seem that way. Let us take for example Papal Elections. There have been dark periods in the leadership of the Church and no one denies it. The Spirit leads us because God is a God of History, not just a God of the moment. The failing of today becomes the basis for the success of tomorrow. But this is not true just of popes or bishops, but of laity who profess to follow Christ and who *bless with one hand and curse with the other*. Many can find fault with any human who carries out God's will, but finding fault with the movement of the Spirit is not as easy because it is so long-term. The Church survives regardless of human foibles and failings and often because of them. The power of Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day rose from human failing. How great would their love seem if there were not the injustices fought? How much more we admired them because we know our own weaknesses, our own inability to act in the face of injustice? The Church exists because of the power of the Spirit. The Church exists because of the here and now involvement (as above, the action or force *in* the world) of God in our world. The Church is based in the saving power, love, and forgiveness of God not in the desires of humanity (and so, as Scarlet O'Hara would say, "*Tommorra' is anotha' day!*"). *What is my role in the Church? What ministry and vocation have I lived out to bring God's love, healing and power into our world?*

Summary: Salvation History

God, not I or any other member of humanity, keeps history bound together. My contribution will quickly be over but its effects will be lasting because either I am the action of God in the world or I am the vehicle of injustice. Salvation History is the spreading of God's love during a temporal period which we humans measure by birth and death but which God measures only in love. Salvation history is not just the history of humanity, though it plays a major part within it. It is the story of God's love within the confines of human history.

Let us not think about our greatness or longevity or historical recognition but think as Jesus tells us, that the greatest is *the one who serves the most*. We the servers must tell ourselves that *we are useless servants who have done nothing more than we were supposed to*. We should be known as *the servant to the servants of God*. What kind of shoulders have we given for others to stand on? Shoulders that are broad and strong from having put our backs into it or *feet of clay* (*Dan. 2:41-43*) crumbling beneath the weight of our own self-importance? After that evaluation we must be honest about ourselves and how we feel. Is the guilt washing over and incapacitating us forcing us to *cover our nakedness* and avoid God and others? Are we suddenly haughty about it, "coping an attitude" toward God and others, daring them to find the fault? Or are we freed? Do we feel the *ongoing* redemptive act of Jesus saving us, those before us, and those who will come after us, until the end of time? God's insertion into history is his Spirit and that is the force of history that we feel.

The God of history and the God of our moment are one. The things that we do have influence on the present and the future to come. God gathers all these things. What we do slips easily into the past adding to the pressure exerted on all of the here and nows. If we do evil then the pressure is created against an injustice to right it. If we do good then that presses for more good. As *a Spirit-filled people* we are the action of God in through history. Therefore the Spirit of History is movement. Not a listless flow but a (disciplined) disciplined progress. We hold the hope of the Kingdom of God in our hands and heart. This is another gift of the Spirit. Saint Cyril of Alexandria reminds us "*Those who have a sure hope, guaranteed by the Spirit, that they will rise again lay hold of what lies in the future as though it were already present.*"

By focusing on the present, we must relinquish some amount of control and take up some amount of discipleship. The future will be in sight but it will retain that necessary fuzziness which is flexibility. The past loses its fuzziness and becomes something that is not separate from the present but is the foundation of the present. Avoid longing for the future and romanticizing the past. If *times were better*, they have

contributed to even better times now. If *better times are coming* it is only because we have laid a solid foundation for them today. If today seems unfounded, it is because our past was unfounded. If our future seems dark it is because we have lost hope today. Remember that as Jesus breathed out his Spirit, he spoke of forgiveness (*Jn. 20:22-23*). Forgiveness is the filler for the empty spaces of the past. Forgive the past and stand solid upon the foundation you have laid. The second step.

Scripture Thoughts:

Wisdom: Genesis 3:1-14; Deut. 4:1-9; Matthew 11:15-19; Job 11; Eccl. 1; 1 Cor. 1:18-31; James 1:5, 3:12-18;

History: 2 Peter: 8; Psalm 90:1-6;

Forgiveness: Matthew 9:1-13; Nehemiah 9:16-20; Matthew 26:28; Acts 2:38; Mark 3:29;

PRAYER ACTION:

Prayer: *You know, O Lord, that man is not master of his way; our course is not within our choice, nor is it for us to direct our steps (Jer. 10:23). Holy Spirit, thread of history, help me focus on this moment rather than the one to come; help me move beyond the guilt and fears of the past which force me away from action today.*

Action: Read the first book of Maccabees in the Old Testament, the whole thing. As you read, meditate on the sense of history the author possesses and compare it to the history of the period you learned in school. Write a short one-page history of your life, based mainly on the 'high-points' you feel you've had, the accomplishments you feel you have made. Now write another one-page history being sure to include those moments when you feel God touched you. How does the perspective in each narrative affect the narrative?

Reflection:

IV The Spirit of Crisis

The power the Spirit has in the world and in our lives is due to our weakness and at times our helplessness; as St. Paul tells us: only when I am weak can I be strong. Let me share with you that this is a hard chapter for me to write and even harder for me to follow!

Why do we feel so alone and powerless even when we are so connected to such history as God's through our Baptism? Life can sometimes appear to be a series of unrelated, random events strung together not by consciousness or conscious decision but by our mere presence within them. At some point, whether by choice or by attrition, the guiding principles in our lives no longer seem to guide us. We are so flexible that we have bent over backwards. Decisions become difficult and draining. It becomes a chore to ask another for help.

There is a Dilbert cartoon by Scott Adams where one of the characters named Wally and Asok, an intern assigned to him, are talking. The intern tells Wally how he is his hero because no matter what comes at him he seems to just bend, he never breaks. Wally replies that he has found that if you don't have a spine they can't break you. We can become so overpowered by events that we cease to stand up to them. We hand responsibility over to 'Fate' or some other 'New Age' external force, even using God this way; we drift with the flow and we wait for someone or thing to tell us what to do. Things become *out of our hands* or *the will of God*. We no longer seek the support of others or if we do seek it, we do so only to authenticate our inaction.

Crisis causes fear but more importantly crisis usually arises from fear. There are many ways to handle the 'bad' events in our lives: confusion, apathy, anger, and selfishness, but all come down to worrying about what will happen to me if this thing goes wrong? I recall the sign over the secretary's desk that states that *your crisis is not necessarily my crisis*. We can feel that there is nowhere to turn, no one to share troubles with. It seems that no one understands or could be expected to understand. My wife gets mad at me sometimes and tells me it is *because I just don't worry well enough!* Other times I am just too ashamed to think that even God can take care of the problem.

Under-standing, that concept which lies under where we stand, leads to confidence, Confidence not just in us but in our God. Again, this is a God who has interjected himself into history - not just at its beginning but all the way to its end. A God who controls all because he created it so that certain outcomes would always be true. That is not to say we are predestined in the modern sense but in Paul's understanding of predestination - because we follow Christ in his death we shall therefore share in his resurrection. That is to say, we live in a creation where *whatever we share with Christ we shall also reap with him*. The Sinai Covenant repeats this again and again. As long as we trust and follow God, our crops will grow; our lives will be good.

The control we exert can only be in the form then, of understanding the consequences of actions and planning ways to help insure the best outcome. This is the Wisdom and knowledge of the Will of God. We allow the Spirit of God to guide us (*Wisdom 1:5-7; 3:9*). When I am weak, I am strong. We become disciples. We accomplish this by following the Commandments, adhering to the Beatitudes and living the Sacraments. This is wisdom and fear of the Lord.

I would further define crisis as an abandonment of hope. Clinging to the belief that all is lost no matter what one does. Incapacitating one's self with doubt, fear, and confusion. Yet, recall a time when you fell; if you think about it, it scared you as much as hurt you, if not more. Someone would calm your fears, kiss the boo-boo and suddenly things didn't seem so bad. When the cut was cleaned, it ceased to look so bad. One by one your fears and concerns were conquered and then laid aside. Comfort grows.

Often we end up not just comforted but comfortable. Then our lives may be set to spinning by any number of things: job changes, marriage, moving, winning the lottery, birth, death, or other such turn of fortune. How can I let the Spirit guide my life? *What? One more outside influence is determining my actions?* But again, life is not about control but about discipleship. Jesus warns us about this when he tells the story of the farmer who has a great harvest and decides to sit back and enjoy it (*Lk. 12:16-21*). The next passage reminds us of our dependence on God and admonishes us not to worry (*Lk. 12:22-48*) but to be prepared. [bad things happen, we plan for them but do not let them incapacitate us] Comfort requires

compassion as a response, not complacency. Comfort increases our ability to be charitable, not just generous. Jesus tells everyone that they will know his disciples because of their love for one another. Love, Paul tells us, *casts out all fear*.

True discipleship leads to life in the Spirit. We can regain discipleship through prayer. In prayer *then* meets *now* as well as the *to come* -- Alpha and Omega. When I give in to the history of a moment then I will see God in that moment; I also gain insight to all of the places God is. But prayer requires discipline. Putting one foot in front of the other until you get through. When my wife and I began childbirth classes, they talked about breathing exercises. These exercises did not remove pain but directed attention away from it. Believe me, if you've ever given birth or witnessed it, this is not an event you can control! The breathing exercises provided nothing more than a natural disciplined (*not controlling*) way to approach the pain of childbirth (which cannot be avoided). So it can be with the pain of life. In a way Saint Ignatius' Spiritual Exercise also mimic the natural way of discipline.

I am always struck by the use of the word *exercise* when describing prayer. But then it does conjure up images of discipline and routine. Prayer is both a noun and a verb. It identifies the action, the event *and* the participant. What is the connection between the Spirit and prayer (both noun and verb)? Prayer connects us to God in an act as intimate as a kiss. There are kisses for grandparents, siblings, friends, and lovers. Scripture often likens our relationship with God to that of man and woman, husband and wife. God gives us the kiss of a lover, touches us in secret places that only a lover who knows us can touch. Sometimes God strokes our hair, sometimes our breast, but whether our mind or our heart, the caresses are sweet (*Songs 7:7-11*).

Oscar Lipscomb, the first Archbishop of Mobile, said in a sermon that God watches us not because he is waiting to catch us when we do wrong but because "*He loves us so much that he cannot take his eyes off of us.*" So, what kind of God controls this world? What kind of relationship can we have? Prayer is an important part of determining that relationship and our prayer will be partly based in how we view God. But what would make us pray? What desire within us is strong enough to overcome fear and self-doubt to initiate any relationship first off and then take it to full intimacy? Purpose aside, what is the object of our prayer? We can question our way out of prayer all day long. It comes down to this: if God is a loving Father, then He will initiate the relationship *and* he will always be there for us. *What father would give his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread?* We must take the chance and respond, and even then, if we cannot find the words then God, who knows all our needs even before we do, gives the Spirit who is there *to pray for us in groanings (Romans)* that only the heart and God can understand.

That said, even if God is a loving Father, then as in any parent/child relationship, there always comes a time when we look up and say *okay, I'll take it from here...* when we separate ourselves from a father's love. Who do we allow into our lives then? Money, possessions, alcohol or drugs, shallow sexual encounters? These negatives always run thin after a while. What then, a friend, a spouse, a lover? The triune God (Father, Son/Brother, and Spirit) is all of these things. Take a moment and think about these questions: *Who do you pray to? When? Is it different for different situations?* Certainly we are always praying to God, but we image him as Father, Son, Spirit.

While I'm at it, let me add that there is no need to pray *to* the Spirit because we pray *in* the Spirit. We implore God to imbue us with His Spirit and that this same Spirit will carry our needs before us. In a Preface for the Eucharistic Prayer the priest states that our praise adds nothing to God but that our desire to praise him is itself a gift from God. Understanding prayer and ourselves as pray-ers can sometimes put us off prayer. Being comfortable also can make us think that prayer is unnecessary. Sometimes we try to gauge our relationship by our gifts; if we're doing well we must have a great relationship with God, if not maybe we need to start praying. If God does not need it, and prayer is not just for the needy, what good is it?

Was there ever a time when humanity did not need prayer? If any, it would have been the Garden of Eden. If you read through the second chapter of Genesis you see no talk of praising God or imploring God to meet needs. The Garden then is a place where we are so much like God that the balance is not upset, the distance between us is not so great. God walked with us in the evening. What was the nature of our relationship with God then? I think that Scripture is telling us that it was a lot like a parent and a sleeping baby. You check on them, take care of their needs but you do not disturb their sleep. Only when they wake up is there a need for interaction. When Adam and Eve 'wake up' it is time for God to step in. He does so by reflecting back to them the knowledge they already have. They hide because they suddenly know that they are naked, exposed. Once they break that relationship with God, they become exposed to fear,

loneliness, separation, pain, toil, death. They become exposed to the outside world. The world is a place that almost seems as if God is not a part of it. This truth, told in a story is as true now as it was then.

But is the Garden a paradigm of punishment or freedom? If we approach it as a paradigm for punishment, i.e. that is we did bad now our human existence is payment for that, then we live in a place from which only death will release us (remember that Life-as-Death school?). Now if we consider it as paradigm for freedom, then the world becomes a place where we have to move beyond childish ignorance and our faith becomes the thing which releases us. How many times do parents say "Welcome to the real world" or "Too bad! Life's tough!"? My wife tells me her father always said, "Life is real, life is earnest!" With the banishment from the Garden, God tells Adam and Eve *welcome to the school of hard knocks*. The world is not a place of punishment for wrong but a place to take *the knowledge of good and evil* and learn right from wrong well within God's love and care. For the first time, God tells us what happens when we step out from under the umbrella. This world is not just a punishment/reward system, but a true *Weltanschauung*, a worldview. What we learn from the Garden experience is not that we are in a place apart from God where we must search our way back to a place we can never reenter, but that God is always here around us waiting for us to live within him once more. Prayer becomes the means of connection with God. Jesus himself tells us this (*John*). Searching and striving, the struggles of life are not about punishment but about stripping away complacency and the things that drag us down, that make us fear, which cause us to be ashamed and paralyzed into inaction.

Evil is merely the twisting of the Good. That is why it often sounds so reasonable or attractive. For an overused example, casual sex (or fornication as Paul would call it) speaks of love, but it is an empty love and therefore not love at all, merely physical pleasure. It does not contain both the life-giving and the life-creating aspects of true love. By removing one aspect it seems, by using the same words, to look the same, but it is not. It lacks the creative act (not just via contraception, we know that is not always used) because the creative act is a act of love not of selfishness. Just because the woman's body has natural cycles and the body also sometimes naturally aborts does not mean that that is justification for artificial contraception and abortion. They remove the natural aspect. They seek justification for selfishness by twisting the natural law within the human being until it seems attractive and palatable. So it is with any sin. This is what the serpent did in the Garden.

We must return to the focus of the Garden that has been restored to us by Jesus through the Holy Spirit, this same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (*Rom. 8:11*) and brought us once more into paradise. If the world is a place of punishment then only the strong survive. If the world is a place of love then all not just survive but flourish. We have to learn that seeming weak to the world is not weakness. True weakness is being weak in God's will and strong to our own wills. Paul tells us that our true strength comes from true weakness. It is all about trusting God; listening more than asking; allowing myself to appreciate the good in a situation rather than focusing on the bad. Prayer is a means of doing that.

Many things make it difficult to stay focused and prayerful. One is the intensity of this life. As might be said in the business world, focusing on God is a 24/7 activity. Rabbinical tradition always turns to humor to make this possible. It is not a humor of resignation but of peace and release. There is the story of the rabbi who is walking out late one night after curfew when a Cossack approaches and asks him "Where are you going old man?" The rabbi replies "I don't know!" With that the Cossack grasps him, drags him to jail and throws him into the cell. As the guard closes the cell door the rabbi looks up and says, "See, I told you I didn't know where I was going!"

You do not always need to know where you are going in order to get someplace. Authentic prayer (I use the word 'authentic' hesitatingly because people can feel inferior and say my prayer cannot be authentic, merely pathetic) is prayer which comes from the very depths of your being, whether it is spontaneous *or* rote. It means being the author of what you are doing. To pray authentically, God must be the focus of our lives. You cannot set God aside. As Fr. Louis Giardino said "*You can't push God to the fringes*" because God is the center of all. Shoving God to the side is not just a you-should-not-do-it-because-it-is-a-bad-thing-to-do; it is that you simply cannot do it for any length of time. Think of it this way: just as the Earth could no more move the Sun from the center of its orbit to the outside can we remove God from the center of our being. We can go along merrily believing that the Earth is the center of the universe but eventually Galileo or Kepler comes along to flip things inside out.

How can you get a handle on that center, you may ask. We can look at life as a line, a thick line. Within the upper and lower boundaries of that line's width we live our lives and the events that seem to take us outside of those limits we can call 'spikes' like the line of a seismograph. The baseline has an acceptable range of up and down movements where we can cope with relative ease. It is the baseline of our jobs, our families, our team sport; we may not realize it but we focus our lives on this baseline. We become pulled when we see things as outside of this baseline. The crises that arise are the spikes outside of our acceptable baseline but they are not always 'bad' things. If your job/career are the driving force (baseline) of your life then your family can become the spikes. "Oh no! I have to spend time with the kids/wife/parents/brothers/sisters!" The "work stinks I'm living for the weekend" mindset also falls into this category: like our teenager earlier, things will always be better when I do this other thing. Unfortunately that one thing is also outside of your 'normal' routine and becomes more stress than the stress it was meant to relieve. Why are we often more tired from a vacation than the tired we were trying to relieve when we went on it? We throw ourselves so whole-heartedly into this thing (which is so outside of our heart) that we can derive no pleasure from it. It is so far afield from what normally brings us pleasure, that deep inside we feel no pleasure from it; alcohol, drugs, sex, money, gadgets, whatever. These things cannot supply the gravity necessary to keep us focused on them. God alone give that. Since creation encompasses everything, including every human activity, and God is the creator of all, when we begin to focus on God everything else falls into line. When the spikes come, they are well within the tolerances of God's love.

Crisis, fear, disconnectedness, greed, selfishness, complacency. These are the things which we feel embattled by. Things which distract us from loving ourselves, others and God. Things which hamper our relationships. We may try to overcome them with self-loathing, sex, drugs, possessions, power. But what we fail to understand, and hence the power of Evil is that we have it twisted. What we perceive as power or empowering is actually self-destructive behavior. Only in surrender, humility and love can we achieve true joy and comfort. Only in giving up can we receive. Only by centering on God, shifting our vision from the twisting of the world, can we achieve a life of surrender, humility and love. Envisioning life as beautiful, living within God, being ourselves with both weaknesses and strengths is the gift of grace from God. We must cease to see life as bad, move from pity to compassion not only for others but for ourselves as well. Transform and be transformed. We can only do this if we trust God. Trust that he has taken care of all our needs (*Lk. 12, Mt.6*)

The Spirit of crisis is the Spirit of love that both quells fear and spurs compassionate response. God the Father gives the Spirit to help us bear the burdens of life as he did for Moses (*Numbers 11:17*). We can move unharmed and praise God even in the midst of the fire (*Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego Daniel 3; also Ps. 91*). Comfort though is not an end in itself. We must forge on ahead into a deeper relationship with God and with others. St. Augustine tells us:

The psalms do not tell us not to love, but to choose the object of our love. But how can we choose unless we are first chosen? We cannot love unless someone has loved us first. Listen to the Apostle John: We love him, because he first loved us. The source of man's love for God can only be found in the fact that God loved him first. He has given us himself as the object of our love, and he has also given us its source. What this source is you may learn more clearly from the Apostle Paul who tells us: The love of God has been poured into our hearts. This love is not something we generate ourselves; it comes to us through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Sermo 34).

Fortunately we are not alone, (*Paul in Corinthians, John 14:18*) either from the Spirit or from God's Spirit in others. These are God's gift to us. Take things with a grain of salt. The Spirit is the Spirit of Unity (*Lenten Eucharistic prayer*) not of individuals. In the Kingdom of God, God's love is supreme, Jesus lives and the Spirit constantly recreates and renews. By our participation in God's life, in his Spirit, we too participate in the creation and renewal of the world. Through that participation, our crises and the crises of others are handled.

Scripture Thoughts:

Confusion/Doubt: Luke 2:49-56; [Synopic's Agony in the Garden]

Focus: Malachi 3:1-4; Colossians 3; I Corinthians 10:12-13;

Peace: John; Romans 8:31-39;

Self Awareness: Matthew 20:30-34 (Luke 18:35-43);

PRAAYER ACTION:

Prayer: *Spirit of God, of calm, of peace, of action, of noise, of good times and of bad, teaches me the response. (As an alternative, I might also suggest here a 'breathing' prayer like the 'Jesus Prayer': where while inhaling you pray: "Lord Jesus Christ Son of the Living God..." and while exhaling " Have mercy on me, a sinner". Repeat until you're done. This form of centering prayer is good for focusing. Drink in the knowledge of Jesus, filling yourself with it and pour out your brokenness, releasing it like the breath you take in and out. Remember God created the world through His breath and Jesus cast peace upon the disciples with his).*

Action: Listen to a song about the love of God such as *On Eagle's Wings* or *O Sacred Head Surrounded*. I like to listen to U2's *Drowning Man* from their *War* album (so of course I recommend it) because it talks of our struggle and God's constant response. Apply that knowledge to a past situation and think about how different the outcome would have been had you known/been able to trust God. Apply it to a situation in which you now feel anxiety.

Reflection:

V Life In The Spirit

T*o live in the Kingdom of God one must understand what it means to live in the Kingdom of God, feel it, believe it and then do it. It is a mental, emotional and physical act as well as spiritual. When we work and endure in union with the Spirit we participate, no, even greater, we collaborate in God's redemptive work. We are the Church.*

First thing to remember is that we do not insert God into our everyday life but insert our everyday life into our life in God. Spirituality is not a cloak you take on and off. Spirituality is the very skin in which you live and life is the cloak.

To live in the Spirit means to dwell within God and therefore to participate in the Kingdom of God. Where or what is that kingdom? Every time we encounter God, we participate in the Kingdom. As Roman Catholics (and for other Catholics and Orthodox in general) we ultimately encounter God within Liturgy and Sacrament. This is the mystical joining of Church and God but it is also our physical joining (within the Kingdom yet also within the World). Sacred Liturgy, in all its forms, is a celebration of the Kingdom of God. In that sense, as the Vatican II fathers tell us, it is our “work” (*Constitution on Sacred Liturgy* 2:). Recall that for the Jews, and therefore for Christians, time and human memory often combine or are viewed as the same. ‘Remembering’ makes the moment present – remember the taste of something...how you can taste it once again? God is the God of Time and God’s time is not our time. The Saints are with us now because in the Kingdom time does not mean what we think it means. Because of this time-outside-of-time (*kairos* – God’s time versus *chronos* – Clock time), God is not limited and the challenges of the Kingdom are not as hard within the Kingdom as they look to be from outside the Kingdom. *If you have the faith the size of a mustard seed, you could command the mountain to cast itself into the sea.*

Come upon these gifts and make them holy so that they may become...the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Transformation. This is the result of the Death and Resurrection. There is a transformation of the bread and wine, of us, of space and time itself. We are the gifts presented to the altar. Like the bread and the wine, sometimes stale, sometimes sour; but so often new and fresh. Whatever their nature, these gifts are transformed by the Spirit. Once again the analogy of a watercolor painting comes to mind. When we view the painting we see trees, rocks, grass, water, sky, but they are not present there. Color fools our eyes, one might say. As the world might say, our beliefs make us fools. I believe more rightly that our eyes transform mere pigment into meaning, that the eye of faith transforms the things of the world into the things of God. The physical world shows us God as God’s hand (as artist) shows us what lies behind the world.

God creates us within history, sustains us within history, and then we pass through history. Our lives are brief but they add to the weight of every life before them, creating the foundation for the future. Just as Christ is the first fruit and we are the body of that fruit, we carry on the work of his hands (*Colossians 1:15-23*) and continue to bear fruit because now we are *holy as he is holy*.

By the mingling of this water and wine may we come to share in the Divinity of Christ. The call to transformation and holiness takes place within the Spirit: *Grant that your Spirit may come upon these gifts to make them holy.* We are the Word’s Body; we are Eucharist for one another; we are the book at the ambo, and we are the gifts on the altar. Our sacrifices are transformed into the sacrifice that helps bring salvation to the world: *May the Lord accept this [or a better translation: **our**] sacrifice... for our good and the good of all his Church.*

We can find much inspiration, and guidance in Church documents and spiritual writings, especially the documents of Vatican II about which Pope John Paul the II stated “*The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council has been a gift of the Spirit to his Church. For this reason it remains a fundamental event not only for understanding the Church's history at this end of the century, but first and foremost for exploring the abiding presence of the risen Christ beside his Bride in the course of world events.*”(*L'Osservatore Romano*; 8 March 2000). Study is an integral part of our faith. We complain that God does not seem to talk to us sometimes during prayer. The Church’s scriptures (Biblical and spiritual/theological) hold many of our prayer’s.

From the outside, Roman Catholicism appears to be made up of Novenas, statues, dark confessionals and arcane rituals. Even growing up Roman Catholic it can be confusing. We tend to blanket our beliefs in

actions that can obscure their original or true meaning. We end up growing up, exploring our world, comparing our experience with what we grew up believing and ending up asking *what do I need to believe?* What *must* I believe? What are the most important things? Sometimes in our confusion we cling to the actions of Catholicism without understanding them; sometimes we abandon them. Having been a catechist for years I am always surprised both by what students (adults as well as teens) bring to class (knowledge wise) and what they bring away from class – usually things I have never heard before, and on the opposite, things I do not remember saying. Hopefully it is what the Spirit wants them to hear! Still, when trying to explain to others I often find myself forced into rejecting the way I have viewed a thing to achieve a better understanding (think back to the first chapter), often achieving in myself the conversion I seek for my students.

What do we believe? Along with so much symbolism, we have so much structure. First, the structure. The Pope is more than a president of the church, he is a *spiritual* leader, chosen and guided by the Spirit (sometimes, when I look at the history of the Church, I have to wonder what the Spirit was thinking but I trust there is a plan). The pope though, is not an end in himself. He like us, is only an *earthen vessel*, a fragile clay pot that holds the treasures of the Spirit (*Wisdom 7:1-6*). He hears the same chastisement as we do during Ash Wednesday: *remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return; repent and believe in the Gospel*. He is a bishop, one of many bishops who handle the day-to-day spiritual necessities of their flocks. Still, he has a ministry of grave import. He is responsible for the faith of millions, to dire consequences if he leads astray (*Mt.*). The pastors he appoints for us bring down a consistent, contemporary and pastoral understanding of Christ and his message. He must present both in a pastoral practicum and a theological rite to the world.

Which leads us to the symbol. The Liturgy is a place of *sacrament* (small ‘s’): a place where we encounter God and renew our pledge of faith to Him. The final words of sacred liturgy are that the communal celebration has ended but that the work has begun: *The Mass is ended, go in peace to love and serve the Lord and one another*. Symbolism points to the things that should be; God’s Spirit calls us to what is. Time is God’s and all time belongs to God. Wherever we encounter God there is *sacrament*. Liturgical and para-liturgical moments are truly blessed moments, riches, where we are rich in our ability to take them, and rich from Christ’s and the Church’s gift of them, but there is also the encounter with God in non-liturgical/non-ritualistic ways in others and in the ‘*outside world*’. The Spirit’s place in this process is well described by St. Bonaventure: “We must ask [the Father] to give us, *through* his Son and *in* the Holy Spirit, a true knowledge of Jesus Christ, and along with that knowledge a love of him” (emphasis is mine).

Or as Saint Cyril of Alexandria states: “By receiving the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of union between us and Christ our Savior, those who are joined to him, as branches are to a vine, share in his own nature.” (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*)

Sacramentally, spiritually, physically, we are bound to Christ through the Spirit. Love is the key: seeking out God’s love through sacrament and through others. Sacrament is a public thing. Shared with the community. It gives hope to the community and the community returns strength through it.

Liturgy is filled with symbols but it is not symbolic. It does not matter which language or style it is celebrated in. It is the place where we encounter God in Spirit, Word, Eucharist, each other, song, sight, sound, and smell. These things are most important and therefore always remain constant. It is important for us to participate, not just observe. How can we feel the healing of forgiveness if we just mouth the words? Do not be sidetracked or put off by the externals of liturgy. Move to its heart and share it with those around you. It is okay to smile at Mass! And what reasons we have to smile! We begin the Mass by greeting and forgiving. We are also greeted and forgiven. We receive as we give, not symbolically but actually. We praise God for his goodness and then we wait for his word.

The Spirit is there among us. We know this because we are gathered in Jesus’ name. We share that presence with one another: *The Lord be with you. And also with you*. The presence of God in his in-spired word comes into our ears and hearts. But these are not just words of the past, are not just to settle in our hearts, they in-spire us as well to understanding and action not just in our minds but in our world today. We are molded, transformed by the Word (who is Christ, who through his death and resurrection transforms us and is present as the Word in the words of Scripture – etc. I hope you get the picture).

Throughout the Mass, we will acknowledge, implore, and invite God to come into our lives and stay. We remember his presence in our world and we ask in special ways to see him there in special people, places, and events. The Prayers of the Faithful are just that – prayers of faithful and hopeful people. A people who know the power of God in the world and have confidence that God will continue to be there for

us. We make these prayers aloud so that everyone will see our trust, without shame and without embarrassment.

These prayers begin our most intense prayer. Our most intimate act. The celebrant invokes all of the Church, living and dead to be present. He calls the Spirit down upon us and our gifts. He speaks the words of Jesus and makes real that event which can seem so far in the past and so out of touch with our world today. But it is not an event from the past it is an event of *then* and *now*. We respond that this is so with The Great Amen. We are now transformed, transported through time and space beyond the physical world to the Kingdom of God. Reality pivots on the point of the Consecration. As the Sun defines and anchors the Solar System, so the Consecration and the Eucharist defines and anchors all of reality. There is no past, no future, no sin, no fear only love and forgiveness shown completely in the sacrifice of Jesus, the gift of Jesus on the altar.

From that spins out all of the history of the Church. We re-mind Mary, Apostles, Saints, the living and the dead, ourselves, our families those who need God in their lives, the sick, the needy, and we recall that now we are in the Kingdom *where every tear shall be wiped away (Eucharistic Prayer IV)*. With a resounding Amen (*'I believe!'*) we stand and praise God once more for his goodness and power, implore him to protect us and aid us in helping others. While you pray the Our Father, look around you. Pray it with and for the people you see right there around you. Think of others who need your prayers. Make these prayers real. Take in Jesus from the people around you with the same reverence you take him in from the Eucharist. In addition, smile. Did I say that?

Participation in the Liturgy reflects our participation in life and the Salvation plan of God. Have fun, make it have meaning, listen to God speak in this prayer of the Church. Consider Liturgical ministry, there are always needs for Acolytes, Lectors, Ushers, Choir members, Priests, Deacons, Sacristans, Eucharistic Ministers and others. And also consider the ministries outside of the liturgy. Remember once more that the end of the Mass tells us that there is more to Life in Christ than the Mass: *The Mass is ended go in peace to love and serve the Lord through one another*. The power of the Pentecost event where the Spirit descended on the disciples and sent them out into the streets speaking the words of truth which were understood by all (Acts 2).

"[Those] filled with the Holy Spirit speaks in different languages. These different languages are different ways of witnessing to Christ, such as humility, poverty, patience and obedience; we speak in those languages when we reveal in ourselves these virtues to others. Actions speak louder than words; let your words teach and your actions speak." (From a sermon by St Anthony of Padua)

Let me once again use some thoughts from the previous sections for reflection. Take a moment to enter thoughts on each in your journal (Also look for these elements at Mass, the next time you go, which incidentally does not have to be just on Sunday). If Love is the key, where does it fit in?

Life. As they say, life is what happens to you when you are making other plans.

What is the purpose of life? Why would God develop such a system? If he loves us why didn't he just put us in heaven? Is it our sin that made it so by forcing us from the Garden or is it more a matter that our sin keeps us from participating fully in the Kingdom of God that has never gone away? What is God's plan for my life? What impact will I have? How can my love give life?

Death. Death seems to limit and yet does not ultimately limit or conquer but frees. It transforms.

Why is there death? Is life a test and death the reward or punishment? How do we use death? Are we going kicking and screaming or do we desire to emulate the late Cardinal Bernadine? How does my love for others and myself reflect an understanding of death? What does the Eucharist tell us about death?

Fear. Fear only limits life and is death in the old sense, before Jesus transformed it.

What is there to be afraid of? What is your greatest fear? What is the one sin you cannot confess no matter what? Why? How/when has love eliminated fears for me? When has my love freed another from fear? When will you be able to confess that sin?

Forgiveness. True forgiveness. We are considered good not because of external devotions but the internal devotion to God which shine through us (which allows Him to shine through us). Think once again about the image of the watercolor painting. How is it like forgiveness? How is your notion or belief about forgiveness different from others? When has forgiveness opened up opportunities for fuller love in you and others?

I must admit that this is one of those moments in the written word where the genius of God really shows through the paltry nature of my thoughts. As you read each of the above topics, can you see how they lead

to one another, and how they participate in one another? How each one can be both a cause and solution to the other? Through the Spirit, God has inspired us to see the connectedness of his plan, especially through the inspired words of Scripture and the teachers of the Church. Just the simple phrase 'God's Word' is so rich and complex. This is why I believe there is a God – how can I say it? The genius of the man is guided by true genius. Our insights are inspired and directed by a founding truth. It is a single truth and all other truths are merely pointers to and hints of that one truth. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Light! I suppose this seems so confusing because it is so rich and so interrelated and every word leads me to yet another thought, which then reminds me of the singleness of the one truth, and I fail. Consequentially, instead of stopping I just ramble till I get the words I really want and I can cut out the rest. There are so many levels to understand that it is no wonder it takes our lifetime to even scratch the surface.

The progression is clear. We are given life, and that life has a limit. Viewed as negatively constraining, this limit creates fears that create false limits and therefore stunted and malformed lives that create more fears (that twisting where fear of death leads to suicide). Only by seeing *and using* the limitless nature of God's love, the timelessness of the Kingdom and his forgiveness of our own shortsighted fears can we truly be free and without limits. Then we understand the fullness of God's love and the beauty of his plan and consequentially come to understand our place within it.

Living in the Spirit means living in the *fullness* of God's love. This means immersing oneself into the life of God and therefore the Kingdom. The evangelist John tries again and again to have Jesus tell us what this means. Luke tries to describe it in Acts and Paul tries to convince us of our place in it. Scripture is the means by which we come to understand, be inspired to and guided in living this life. We say that the Scriptures are inspired, but what does that mean? They are *in-spir-ated*, which is they are infused with the Spirit of God and the Spirit of God as revealed through the experiences of humanity. We the Church, the Body of Christ and so too are conduits of the revelation of God. Without the Scriptures, we would not be ignorant of God, yet we would be ignorant of God. By that I'm not saying that the oral tradition would not sustain it, but we must see it in terms of who we are now. Firstly, we are a literate culture. The written word is paramount to the structure of our world and our society. The written tradition has replaced the oral tradition today as the means of the revelation of truths but the tradition shapes the Scripture so that it cannot stand aside from it. Understanding the fullness of the love of God requires us to seek a teacher. [The teacher is our shared understanding of Scripture (preserved by the Magisterium) so Scripture is bound up with our Community.] The teacher is Scripture and Scripture is bound up with our Community. So God's Word is God's Wisdom and our understanding of it as inspired by God and gathered within the context of the community. Scripture takes many literary forms because there are so many ways of seeing God's actions in our lives and our world. Our limited nature grasps the unlimited nature of God and lays it out using human words, which are human experience [too much reading of Umberto Ecco perhaps].

The traditions that lead to the formation of Scripture also play a role in teaching us about God. The two are inseparable. Scripture is Revelation, and Jesus is the greatest Revelation. So, Scripture is like Jesus (*The Word*). God uses our human nature to reveal himself to us. That is what makes Jesus the ultimate revelation of God. This is not to say that God does not still reveal himself in the world but that he always does it through Christ (and by extension through his body, the Church and therefore, as I said above, we are the conduit of revelation). Since human nature is the vehicle of Revelation, then our traditions, understandings, talents, words and our actions make up the dynamic nature of the spreading of that Revelation. If we do not devote our lives to being the means of Revelation then we will have trouble understanding what it means to live in the fullness of God's love to have life in the Spirit. Even though the Scriptures are bounded by a historical context, they are the sum total of the human experience of God. They completely involve our nature our actions, our understandings, and us. There is no new revelation because it is always the same truth: *Hear oh Israel, the Lord your God is one, is Lord alone and you should love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole mind, your very being, and your neighbor as yourself (Deut. 6:4-5)*. Jesus himself repeats this. In order to make sense of our present experiences we must filter them through this Revelation. Scripture is that means. In Scripture is bound up all of who we are, our traditions and our knowledge. These things made the Scriptures and Scripture reflects them but as all is from God it also explains them. Scripture, like liturgy is an integral part of life in the Spirit. Once again from Bonaventure:

“The outcome or the fruit of reading Holy Scripture is by no means negligible: it is the fullness of eternal happiness. For these are the books which tell us of eternal life, which were written not only that we might believe but also that we might have

everlasting life. When we do live that life we shall understand fully, we shall love completely, and our desires will be totally satisfied. Then, with all our needs fulfilled, we shall truly know *the love that surpasses understanding* and so *be filled with the fullness of God.*"

We will be transformed. We are transformed through a combination of things, all of which are fueled by God's love for us. Discipline, study, prayer, listening, acting.

Allowing our selves to be transformed means that the little things become as easy as the big things. True power in our lives and in this world comes not from any action we can do ourselves, no plan or scheme but only by true and full abandonment to God. This is the Kingdom of God. It is a mystical place but it is also a real, physical, sacred place. The meaning of the Latin word *sacramentum*, from which we derive our words sacred and sacrament, was initially the binding gift or collateral that is fronted for an agreement, lawsuit, or covenant. Later it came to mean the vow that bound a soldier to his general. Sacrament is that point which binds us together with God and as a community with each other. This bond dictates our actions. This bond is holy and sacred inasmuch as we allow God's Spirit into our lives.

Life in the Spirit is more than just living a good life, it is living a sacramental life. A life in constant contact with God, with the Spirit in liturgy and scripture as a conduit. Using the parable of the Foolish Virgins (*Mt. 25:1-13*) Seraphim of Sarov states: "I think that what they [the foolish virgins] were lacking was the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God. These virgins practiced the virtues, but in their spiritual ignorance they supposed that the Christian life consisted merely in doing good works. By doing a good deed they thought they were doing the work of God, but they little cared whether they acquired thereby the grace of God's Spirit." (*A Conversation Of Saint Seraphim of Sarov with N. A. Motovilov*).

When examining our consciences we should keep two things in mind. First, as Seraphim tells us our works are just good works if they are not infused with the Spirit. Second as Emile Zola puts it so well "The artist is nothing without the gift, but the gift is nothing without work." The gift of Grace is free and complete. We must take it in and use it. *For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous (Romans 2:13).*

Living in the Spirit means as Paul tells us, taking on Christ. It is more than the popular evangelical question: *What Would Jesus Do?*, it is taking on the role of Christ. We must literally wear God's love like a mantle on our shoulders, *like precious oil upon the beard, running down upon the collar*. It is no surprise then that we use oils so liberally in the sacraments. We must be surrounded and covered by God's Kingdom in a visible, hard to wash off way. Defining ourselves not by our world's work but by God's love. *Since we live by the spirit, let us follow the spirit's lead (Galatians 5:25). And I shall put my spirit in you, and you will live.... (Ezekiel 37:14a)*

Scripture Thoughts:

Everlasting Life/Holiness: 1 Peter 2:13-16; Micah 7:8; Galatians 6:8-9; 1 Corinthians 15:12ff; 2 Corinthians 3:7 - 4:4

Death: Habakkuk 2:2-9; Hosea 13:14; Lamentations 1:20; John 21:18-19; Romans 5:10-18;

Power: Matthew 17:14-21; Psalms 20; Proverbs 24:5 (among others)

PRAYER ACTION:

Prayer: *Jesus you came to give us life and to give it more fully. To that end you gave us your Spirit. Help me to accept life as gift and as to seek its fullness. Help me to find the time to pray and read your word. Let it show me my power over sin and death and my role in sharing that with others.*

Action: Join a Bible study group or form one if you have to. Study the parts and history of the Liturgy.

Reflection:

VI Where the Spirit is

This final section tells a story. Inspired by the Song of Songs, this is a story of the Spirit alive in our time, affecting lives, restoring hope, giving joy, and moving on only to return and surround us again. In the end each of us must look backwards to see where the Spirit has affected our lives. Only then will we recognize that God is alive and working in us and through us in the here and now. So where does the Spirit Go? Whither it will; it is we who must follow.

There is a song by the rock group U2 called *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*. They sing of a man who has everything, in this case ultimately salvation, knows it is real, and still struggles to keep it ahead of him. I have been quite blessed in my life and yet I still have much doubt. I struggle because of the good I know/have known and my worthiness to receive it. Others argue if there is so much good in your life, what is the struggle? I cannot say which path is better; saints throughout history have made cases for each.

That not withstanding, what am I? Am I a *clown of God* like Nouwen? Am I *all things to all men* like Paul? Hearing God's call and discovering his plan does not always seem to include a clear path or the means of accomplishing it. How do I let the Spirit shine in my life (*I Cor 12:1-31*)? '*When did we see you naked or hungry?*' (*Mt. 25:37ff*) might be the better question. How do I live out the life of the Spirit within me?

The question posed in this last section of the book is '*Where have I seen the Spirit at work?*' I must admit for myself, that it does not seem to always be in hindsight. Once we see where the Spirit has worked in our lives we have a better clue of what effects it had, depending on our strengths and weaknesses. Maybe not the full answer but there you find plenty of clues.

When I decided to leave the seminary, a great man by the name of Fr. Joe Propps was my spiritual director. I told him that when I prayed hard, in my heart was a voice that spoke of things other than seminary and priesthood but I could not bring myself to admit exactly what the voice was telling me. I was wrestling with the angel like Jacob, fighting God for no good reason. That struggle-time taught me that sometimes I am just not willing to trust, much less do the other things required of me. I was a Southerner dealing with that most rankling of Southern problems – redemption. I worried more about disappointing people than serving God. Joe was wonderfully peaceful in that mid-Western sort of way. He would sit across the darkened room, lit by candles and spiritual ambience, quiet. I would gaze across to him, he stretched out in the chair, his glasses giving a reflective surface that often hid his eyes. I would lean forward active, arguing my point. The image still calms me (as well as making me laugh and shake my head at myself). One evening I finally told him that even though these had been the best years of my life, deep down in my heart I knew I was going to have to leave and he told me he knew it too. He had prayed hard for me, and I knew that prayer helped. Then he told me not to worry, that sometimes *you just have to listen to the Lord*.

Now why, I wondered would that be a revelation to me after five and a half years in seminary?

I tell that story to speak an example of the active nature of the Spirit in my life. I can tell you that it offered no hint of the future or what the outcome would be. But the story has meaning. Story telling is an old art. It is the reason that today we even know of God and his Spirit. God shared his story with us and through us and continues to tell that story in His Church. We have to ask ourselves what Gospel we will write; what lives have been shared with us that need to be recounted for the salvation of others? So, now I will attempt to tell a story. This story is not about me though I have some small role in it, and some parts of it are actually true.

There once was a young man who felt the call to God and country equally strong, and he answered both with equal weakness. He did his duty to both but mainly because each introduced him to his first love, Art. He reveled in the sensual knowledge given by Art and it was there that his path lay. He reclined more and more on the couch of his lover's palette, following her wherever she was, looking for ways to get to know her better to uncover her secrets for himself. He fell farther and farther away from both God and country.

One day in a far away land, while waiting to steal more glimpses of his love, the young man saw another, older man. In this man, he saw a kindred spirit who followed a love with the same fierce devotion, as did the young man. The young man was far from his home and at the end of his path. His love Art had no more secrets to tell him save one, the one she had kept from him the longest. As the two passed, the men shook hands. As their hands touched, the young man's love arrived suddenly, whispered her final secret in his ear and then disappeared into the crowd.

The man carried the handshake and the whisper back home with him. When he told his grandfather of his experience the old man eyed him severely. He demanded to know what the young man had learned. The young man was silent because he was afraid to speak his true heart but the grandfather refused to let him use his fear as an excuse. Again he demanded an answer. The young man spoke of the respect he had learned for what was beyond the outside of things, discovering that thing that made them be. His grandfather smiled, "Now you have clasped true Love my boy; follow it."

From that moment the young man grew in grace and wisdom, but he still felt his old love's call. He learned that art was not just for art's sake and that he expressed God's beauty not just with his own hands but also with God's hands. He remembered the handshake and even amidst the calls of his old love, sought out the company of others who pursued this new Love. He was sure of his new Love and he followed with equal zeal; he knew his Love and his Love knew him.

As the years went on, the young man was no longer young. He had spent many years faithfully telling others about his Love through words and deeds, and while his body had shrunk and worn down, it had expanded his heart. Now that he was old, he thought he knew the ways of his now long aquatinted Love but he was wrong. One day his Love seemed to leave him. He knew now that his life was almost over and he needed his Love to see him through the end. He went to his mentor and told him of his troubles. Even though his body was weak he had decided to seek out his old love and persuade her to stay once again with him, to fill his emptiness. His mentor sent him on his way.

He returned to the far away country to seek out his old love where she had left him. When he found her, he begged her to allow him to stay with her, but she pointed him back to his new Love as she had pointed him forward those many years ago. The old man sent out calls for his new Love to rejoin him once again. His health began to decline

[He cried out for his Love but only whores came to him. Amidst them though, he heard both his love and his Love's voices. They reminded him of the love he had shared, with even those rejected by the world, and that the Love's love always returned when given away. He began to see that his new Love was there and again his old love's secret still held true -- that the outside covers God but cannot hide him; it is the true art which lets Love shine through. He began to draw strength from his loves through those whom they provided and to give once again strength in return. He ministered to the outcast as they had ministered to him].

As the man grew in strength, so he also grew in spirit. He understood that his loves had never abandoned him but that he was looking in the wrong direction. He turned his head and there his new Love stood full before him. His Love began to bring more and more others for the old man to love and to be loved by. He never said I am too old for so many! He never turned away those who his Love sent because he had come to understand. His old love would return to take him on journeys deeper into his new Love. Many whom the new Love sent did not know the Love well so the old man took them on his journeys, often starting by using his first love. Many came to be lovers not only of art but of Love as well.

Once a young love appeared on the old man's doorstep pointed there by others. The old man shook his hand, felt kindred to this young man and told him so. The young man puzzled over this for a long time but the old man felt a joy had been given him amongst all that had been asked of him, a kid brother among little brothers and sisters. He showed the young man, new to the Love the old man knew so well, his Vision Splendid. He took the young man to secret art places and showed him where his Love had spoken with him and hoped his Love would speak with the young man. Again and again with every visit the young man became a deeper love and so before he finally left he told the old man so.

Time passed and the young man wrote his new older brother that he would take a wife. The seasoned lover sent this young love letters. Along with them came two things, one expressed God's beauty with the old man's own hand and the other a simple photo of beauty from God's hand. The old man rejoiced for his love and for the young man's love.

Still, time passed, and the old man was beginning to hear his Love's call: soon... it would be soon. In the end the old man knew the secret whispered in his ear so long before in the crowd: There is only one path, one Love, one Spirit that binds them all – that is the purpose and pursuit of life.

One day the young man received a letter not in the old man's hand. The old man was finally forever with his Love, the letter said and that was that. A light breeze stirred on the young man's cheek as the old man passed by. The now-not-so-young man realized that the breeze was the Spirit and the cycle constantly repeats itself as he reached out to shake a hand.

They say people live again in our memories and so they never die. I say we live fully in the memory of those such lovers who have gone before us into the communion of saints because they never die. Fr. Francis Harpin's watercolor painting adorns my wall, a gift and a vision to my wife and I. Though dead many years, he still touches our life, still [intercedes] prays for us to God, I know, for we see and feel the answers to his prayers. His life story, entitled *Vision Splendid* he shared freely and has touched many, many people. His open door gave many their first real taste of the uncompromising love of God. His love for the Eucharist spurs me on even today after many years. When I think about his suffering and his joy, I know Jesus. The *power of the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead* surrounds us. The power of the Spirit enters us in the Eucharist. The Spirit of God and of Jesus lives. We live amongst *the Saints in light*. They surround us. If we release our fears, by acknowledging and confessing them, then rely on God to provide all the answers to those fears whenever they arise, then we allow the Spirit to work God's will within us and we will shine with the light of the Spirit of God.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, which most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.” (A Return To Love - *Marianne Williamson, used by Nelson Mandela in his 1994 Inaugural Speech*)

We cannot control life we can merely live it to its fullest. The Engaged Encounter movement speaks of the ‘decision to love’, that everyday you must get up and decide to love the other person in your life. How easy it is to delay that decision or event to give up. Not just with spouses but children, parents, brothers, sisters, friends, people you will meet that day, people with needs, failings, love, and kindness. On our own, we would not be able to do it. We are not perfect but perfected in love. It is easy to become discouraged, to be pulled down by the cares and concerns of the world. Being *holy as God is holy* does not mean being God but thinking, acting, and loving *like* God, allowing ourselves to be immersed in the love of the Trinity, an ability that has been breathed into our nostrils from our very creation, something we can understand through prayer and listening, the gift already given which we must just use: The Spirit. How hard! I too must listen to hear these words!

We must have an attitude of prayer. We must pray, as Paul incites us, *always*. To pray always is to have an attitude of prayer, which means communing with God in all things, seeing, recognizing, and acknowledging him in every moment of our lives, in the good, the bad, the happy, the sad. No worry thought, the Spirit is there to help us as we walk this prayer journey, and to carry us when we are unable to walk. We are a sacred people, consecrated to God in our baptism, we live a sacramental life.

The Spirit moves like the wind while we take baby steps. We have to but spread our wings, let the Wind flow around us, lift us and then we can *fly like the eagle*; and then we will *never grow weary*.

“The Holy Spirit renews us in baptism through his godhead, which he shares with the Father and the Son. Finding us in a state of deformity, the Spirit restores our original beauty and fills us with his grace, leaving no room for anything unworthy of our love. The Spirit frees us from sin and death, and changes us from the earthly men we were, men of dust and ashes, into spiritual men, sharers in the divine glory, sons and heirs of God the Father who bear a likeness to the Son and are his co-heirs and brothers, destined to reign with him and to share his glory. In place of earth the Spirit reopens heaven to us and gladly admits us into paradise, giving us even now greater honor than the angels, and by the holy waters of baptism extinguishing the unquenchable fires of hell.

We men are conceived twice: to the human body we owe our first conception, to the divine Spirit, our second. John says: *To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. These were born not by human generation, not by the desire of the flesh, not by the will of man, but of God.* All who believed in Christ, he says, received power to become children of God, that is, of the Holy Spirit, and to gain kinship with God. To show that their parent was God the Holy Spirit, he adds these words of Christ: *I give you this solemn warning, that without being born of water and the Spirit, no one can enter the kingdom of God.*” (*On the Trinity*, Didymus of Alexandria)

Scripture Thoughts:

Story: Genesis 1-2; the parables of Jesus:

Weakness: Romans 8:26-27; 2 Corinthians 12:7-11; Hebrews 11;

Decisions: Psalm 25; Psalm 73 (a favorite); Isaiah 42:16; John 16:13; Hosea 6

PRAYER ACTION:

Prayer: *Lord, you love us with an everlasting love, one unbounded by our ability to love or our ability to sin. Remind me/us that Christianity is not about vast conspiracies removing our right to pray in schools but about feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and imprisoned, clothing the naked, loving those not thought to be lovable, loving our God with all that we are and loving others as we should love ourselves. Fill me/us with the knowledge that the Spirit surrounds me/us, gives me/us the strength, and abides with us. Make me/us a perfect offering and perfect me/us in your love.*

Action: Combine the two narratives you wrote after chapter two.

Reflection: