

Conversion



The Holy Spirit, which imparts God's Love and is the agent of transformation, gently moves in our hearts pointing us in a different direction that we are naturally heading. It doesn't shout, scream or push, so much inner solitude and silence is needed to become aware of the soft, gentle movement of the *Spirit of love*. It takes faith to believe that we are always being guided deeper into love. Sometimes we may still distrust the Spirit, being afraid to be led to places where our freedom will be taken away. But God is only love, and God's Spirit of love longs to guide us to the place where the deepest desires of our heart can be fulfilled. Often we don't even know what our deepest desire is. The Spirit of love says: "Don't be afraid to let go of your need to control your life. Let me fulfil the true desire of your heart."

Jesus encouraged his disciples to set their hearts on God's kingdom, promising that all their other needs would be fulfilled as well. The kingdom is not only a future object of our hope. Rather, it is the here and now active presence and working of the Holy Spirit within us, imparting God's Love and offering us the freedom we desire. Our hearts are naturally preoccupied with many concerns and worries, so a *radical change of heart is required* to allow us to experience the reality of our existence from God's perspective. This is conversion – a *complete turnaround* that enables us to discover that we are not the prisoners we think we are. God's promise is that if we set our hearts on God's kingdom, all the freedom we desire will be ours.

Jesus seldom answers the questions people bring him directly (see, for example, Matthew 20:22; 22:30; Acts 1:7-8). What is happening is that he responds to our questions from below – the various human concerns, such as power and influence, theology, or foreign occupation – with *answers from above* – from the perspective of his intimate relationship and communion with God – being fully at one with his Father through the new birth or soul transformation by God's Love (John 10:30). To hear Jesus answers, *we too need to be reborn from above* (see John 3:3, 17:22). Those so reborn have received the Divine Love in their hearts through the Holy Spirit which enables them to break out of the prison of human entanglements and be free to pursue a spiritual life in God (see John 3:6).

In our ongoing search for meaning, we need to read books and newspapers in a spiritual way. We should always be asking why are we on earth, and interpret the events in our lives in that light. What we read helps us to know the signs of the times which in turn gives our lives meaning (see Luke 12:54-56). Jesus shows us how to interpret the political, economic and social events in a spiritual way. He sees bloodsheds, disasters and other suffering and death as an *invitation to conversion* – “unless you repent, you will perish as they did” (see Luke 13:2-3). The deepest meaning of history then becomes a constant invitation and calling to turn our hearts to God and so discover the full meaning of our lives.

Mission is seldom a one-way street as it is often perceived. Rather, wherever the Holy Spirit works, there is a *reverse mission*. Being aware of this enables us to see a deeper meaning in events as well as in our activities. We become open to allowing others, including those whom we may be trying to help, to offer us their unique spiritual gifts. Through the universal working of God’s Spirit, the poor have a mission to the rich, the blacks have a mission to the whites, those with disabilities have a mission to the “normal”, the gays have a mission to the straight, and the dying have a mission to the living. Those made victims by the world become God’s evangelists and bearers of good news, calling us to conversion.

We tend to look at the various crimes against humanity, such as the Holocaust, and wonder about the guilt of the perpetrators in God’s sight. Smugly, we may think we would never be capable of such evils. This, however, is not God’s thinking or questions. What really counts is our *willingness to let the immense suffering of our brothers and sisters free us from all arrogance as well as judgments and condemnations, and give us a heart as gentle and humble as the heart of Jesus*. Our constant thinking about others close by or far away keeps us distracted and allows us to ignore the truth that *we are the first needing a change of heart, and probably the only ones whose hearts we can change*. As Jesus said to Peter, who asked what would happen to his fellow disciple, John, he says to us: “What does it matter to you? You are to follow me.” (John 21:21-22).

The desert fathers from the fourth century said: *“Judging others is a heavy burden.”* If we are attentive to the inner heart / soul transform-ation taking place within us through the movement of the Holy Spirit imparting God’s love, we’ll notice moments in our lives where we feel free of judging others. At such times we feel much freer and lighter as well as experiencing a deep love for and solidarity with all people. Our inner walls break down and our hearts open wide. These moments are like glimpses of heaven – of peace and beauty. If we choose to claim these special moments as God’s way of showing us the deepest truth of our existence, we can gradually step beyond our need to judge others and our inclination to evaluate everything. We can then grow towards real inner freedom.

The way to free ourselves from the need to judge others is by *claiming for ourselves the truth that we are the beloved daughters and sons of God*. To the degree that we embrace the truth that our identity is not rooted in our success, power, or popularity, but in God's infinite love, to that degree we can let go of our need to judge. Jesus exhorts: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; because the judgments you give are the judgments you will get." (Matthew 7:1). Only when we claim the love of God, the love that transcends all judgements, can we overcome all fear of judgment. When we become free of the need to judge others, we'll also become completely free from the fear of being judged, for these two are closely connected.

Reference: This series of reflections was inspired by and adapted from Henri Nouwen's book, *Here and Now, Living in the Spirit* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1994), 39-49.

Photo: Intellimon, Ltd.