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“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now” (John 16:12).

Acts 17:15, 22—18:1; John 16:12-15

Most of us cannot take in important news—good or bad—all at once. We need to absorb it, sort it out, consider its implications, fashion our response. A couple declaring their love for the first time can hardly believe such good fortune, and they need to laugh, even cry, in order absorb it, test it, see if it is real. A man who learns he has a fatal disease puts up his defenses, even jokes about it because it can’t be true.

When Jesus told his disciples there were things they could not bear yet, he was alerting them to both difficult news and wonderful news. They were about to undergo a transformation that would break their hearts but also enlarge their lives in ways they could not fully grasp now. One world was about to end for them so that a new world could begin. In another verse, Jesus compares them to a woman in childbirth who forgets her pain when she experiences the joy of bringing a child into the world.

Peter underwent this anguish when he failed Jesus but was then forgiven and restored as the leader the Apostles in proclaiming God's mercy. Paul's conversion was so traumatic it first blinded him, and then it took him years to absorb fully what he had seen in a flash on the road to Damascus. The church was born in unbearable joy through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The disciples had to pass through the same Paschal mystery to understand that glory comes from suffering.

It is appropriate that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was with the disciples at Pentecost. She knew the full weight of God's plan revealed by the hovering Spirit over her as a girl in Nazareth. She said yes to conceiving the Incarnate Word in her womb, to giving birth to Jesus, watching him grow and take up his ministry. She had pondered all these things in her heart. The child she bore and raised with Joseph was the beloved son whose lifeless body she held when he was taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb.

There is no half measure in our discipleship. If we follow Jesus, we will get the whole story, the full, unbearable joy of the Good News. What Mary pondered in her heart we will also weigh in our decision to walk with him. If it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer in order to enter his glory, it will be our journey as well. With each step forward, we descend and ascend at the same time, are emptied and filled, losing our lives in order to find them. There is much more Jesus has yet to tell us. Can we bear it?

This is why the Holy Spirit must come to fill the hearts of the faithful and to kindle in us the power of his love. Then we will be ready for the whole truth.

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