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“I came into the world as light” (John 12:46).

*Acts 12:24--13:5a; John 12:44-50*

The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of how the early church emerged from a small, obscure movement at the edges of the Roman Empire inspired by the death of a crucified man and claims he had risen from the dead. Preachers spread this “good news” throughout the empire, saying that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, was God’s messenger to the world offering eternal life to anyone who believed in him and lived as he had, with love and justice in the service of others.

The first miracle of the church was that it survived at all from its own internal quarrels and the violent efforts to keep it from changing the course of history. The agent of its surprising birth and extraordinary growth, according to Acts, was none other than the Holy Spirit of God, the Lord of Life, moving humanity from darkness into light, from fear and distrust into community as the goal of history. What we now take for granted in hindsight must have been an exhilarating and exhausting journey step by step for the first Christians.

Fr. Al Ebach once shared a childhood memory about the dark winter morning when his father told him to go feed the horses. He was afraid of getting lost in the snow, but his father told him to go step by step, first to the light on the barn, then to the light on the corral, where he would find the horses. The Apostles Saul and Barnabas were selected by the Holy Spirit to begin a journey that would take them from light to light into the unknown shadows of the ancient world to preach the Gospel of Jesus. Their success was an act of courage and faith that opened the way for the first

generations of missionaries and faith communities that transformed a dying empire from the bottom up, like light, salt and leaven imperceptibly altering the culture and values of society.

The fourth Gospel describes Jesus as light: “I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness.” Transformative change has always appeared like the curve of light running down the full length of the globe as the earth rotates into the sun. Dawn comes for everyone, even those who prefer the darkness and resist the gift of every new day. Who can deny that we are on the threshold of unprecedented promise as we emerge from the pandemic and take up the challenge of a new birth in hope, for our planet, global community and shared purpose? Out of crisis and resistance comes the holy breath of the same Spirit that blew upon the waters of chaos in the beginning.

Easter is the only first movement in the rising symphony that culminates in Pentecost: *Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.*

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