Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world” (John 16:33).

Acts 19:1-8; Jn 16:29-33

Jesus once told his disciples he had much to say to them but they “cannot bear it now." If you are Irish or even half Irish, as I am, you think it must be bad news. But there are also things we need to know that are too wonderful to bear. We simply cannot absorb them all at once.

It is said that some people who pray fervently for something can’t take “yes” for an answer. They are convinced that what God wants must involve great trial and suffering, and so they are prepared for "no" or "pray harder." In fact, just when we think everything is breaking down, we experience a breakthrough. What feels like dying turns out to be rebirth.

Ask Saul of Tarsus. This fire-breathing inquisitor was stopped in his tracks by the crucified, risen Christ. The knowledge he received about who Jesus really was so overwhelming it blinded him. He spent a long time in the wilderness (“Arabia,” he writes) letting the truth of Jesus’ lordship sink in and, even more challenging, his own selection as an Apostle of the Good News of universal salvation.

In today’s passage from the fourth Gospel, Jesus tells disciples that for a time things are going to get worse, but then they will get better. And in the end, everything is going to succeed in a burst of grace and triumph. “Take courage, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Their self-assurance will disappear when the worst thing imaginable happens. Jesus will be arrested, tortured and crucified. They will be scattered and alone. They will find trouble, but by his death Jesus will conquer the world. He will be with them again and they will be filled with the power of his Holy Spirit as their advocate and comforter.

We now find ourselves in the same place. Nothing seems to be working out. War rages, our nation is badly divided, violence and fear prevail, a pandemic will not subside, the Earth is in trouble, global instability threatens. Yet, Pentecost is promised. God’s invitation to respond with vision and courage will come.

Now is the time to open ourselves wide for what God will freely give to anyone who asks for it -- the Holy Spirit. And if it feels like it just might cost us everything, don’t be afraid and keep going forward, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

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