Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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"If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father" (John 14:30).

Acts 14:19-28; *Jn 14:27-31a*

In his final discourse at the Last Supper, when Jesus speaks about "going to the Father," he is referring to his death.

The disciples cannot imagine life without Jesus. But if he does not die, the transfer of his person and mission into his disciples cannot take place. They are to be his body in the world and in history, extending the mystery of God's redemptive plan in time and space through the church. The time-bound, geographically limited physical presence of Jesus of Nazareth must give way to the universal presence of the risen Christ, the pioneer of the New Creation.

Theologically, the Incarnation happens twice: First, in the historical presence of Jesus as a human being, and second, in the birth of the church by the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This is when the divine life animates the disciples and sends them to be Jesus in the world.

The most important threshold every person must cross in their development toward maturity is when they choose from and internalize the influences that have shaped them. An adult no longer acts in conformity to the will of another, but freely from their own inner self. This self can be formed in obedience, but full responsibility now rests with the individual. Letting go of our need for approval or fear of punishment is the moment of independence that begins to make a human being mature.

The disciples anguished over this transfer of power and responsibility from Jesus to them, but it was the crucial act that determined the future of the church. And it was not a one-time occurrence. The same transfer must happen for each generation of the church for the mission to continue. We must in our time accept our responsibility for becoming Jesus to the world.

This transfer desperately needs adults. Without them, the church will remain in a childish state of immaturity characterized by conflict and blame and by people who want power without responsibility, truth without dialogue, and peace without reconciliation. The mission of the church must first happen among us. Only then will we have evidence to show the world about the power of God at work within and through us.

To make possible this transition of self-possession and freedom, Jesus offers us his own “Shalom,” a reality much greater than simple peace, the absence of conflict. To live in the *Shalom* of the Holy Spirit is to have what evangelical Christians call “blessed assurance.” This is an intimate sense of union with God that nothing can take from us.

Unlike the peace of mind or heart the world offers, this is not dependent on circumstances, the happiness that comes and goes. It is joy, the permanent possession of ultimate good, the promise of God. Even in our failures and sinfulness along the way, we are always beloved and constantly renewed in God’s absolute love for us.

St. Paul speaks eloquently of this *Shalom* when he reassures his community in Rome: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This is blessed assurance, and it is the joy of the Gospel.