
A SPIRIT OF COURAGE

I want to share one more reading today that goes well with these other two for presenting a message we need these days.

Romans 8:14-17: ¹⁴ *For those who are led by the SPIRIT OF GOD are the children of GOD.* ¹⁵ *The SPIRIT you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the SPIRIT you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by HIM we cry, "ABBA, FATHER."* ¹⁶ *The SPIRIT HIMSELF testifies with our spirit that we are GOD's children.* ¹⁷ *Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of GOD and co-heirs with CHRIST, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.*

It seems that there is so much fear in the air today.

- So, Paul's words in Romans 8 can be such a lift this week:
 - *"The SPIRIT you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the SPIRIT you received brought about your adoption into sonship."*

Not a spirit of fear, but one of adoption.

- And a "spirit of adoption" means a spirit of confidence and courage;
 - confidence and courage that comes from knowing that you have been chosen---and accepted---and loved, simply for who you are.

The SPIRIT we have received is *not* a spirit of fear.

As I said, there is so much fear going around today and there are so many that are playing on and with our fears.

- Political candidates believe that they can count on our votes if they first create a sense of fear and panic,
 - and then offer themselves as the remedy.
- Inflation and a less-than-robust economy leaves many with a fear of job loss or a fear of retirement security.
- We live with the fear of an unsafe world;
- or of losing a loved one;
- or of dealing with pain without adequate medication.

There is a lot of fear going around these days.

- And when you get caught up in it, it's hard to see or feel anything different.
 - Have you felt that kind of anxiety and fear?
 - Have you known that kind of worry?
 - Fear of not making budget?
 - Fear that if you take a particular stance people will reject you?
 - Fear that no matter how hard you try, it simply isn't going to work out?
- When we are unsure about the future of our status or income or identity, it's easy to lose sight of the hopeful end toward which we are striving;
 - it's easy though to give into the crippling effects of fear.

Fear.

- There's a lot of it going around today.
 - So, is there any way we can be overcoming fear?
- *"The SPIRIT you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the SPIRIT you received brought about your adoption into sonship."*
- Paul's words are so important and necessary for us to hear.
- *When we cry, "ABBA! FATHER!" it is that very SPIRIT bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of GOD,*
 - *and if children, then heirs, heirs of GOD and joint heirs with CHRIST.*

This, in a nutshell, is one of the blessings of the HOLY SPIRIT--

- to come along side of us in times of anxiety and fear to remind us that because we are GOD's children, we do not have to give into fear.
- Actually, Paul goes beyond that.
 - We are not only children of GOD, but heirs of GOD, those destined to inherit all good things.
 - And if that's not enough, we are not only heirs in general, but co-heirs with CHRIST.
 - Co-heirs means that GOD has called us worthy to receive all the inheritance and merit and reward and favor that CHRIST is given and deserves.
 - And when you're loved that fiercely and that deeply, fear should have absolutely no control over you.

And this message is not just in Paul's letter to the Romans.

- In the story in Acts we hear of a group of believers who had everything to fear and, indeed, had been nearly crippled by fear earlier.
 - Yet on Pentecost they receive the gift of the HOLY SPIRIT,
 - a SPIRIT that equipped them and empowered them to go out into the public square and witness to their faith in CHRIST.
 - By doing so, they risked not simply having people think they were drunk, but perhaps also criminals, deserving of the crucifixion their leader had suffered.
 - Yet that SPIRIT of courage emboldened them so that they not only resisted their fear,
 - but actually, were able to step out in confidence and joy.

John also testifies to much the same.

- Philip's question in today's gospel is rooted in anxiety.
 - Understandable anxiety, as this is the night before JESUS' crucifixion and JESUS had just told His followers that HE was leaving them.
- So, Philip is worried, anxious, and perhaps a little afraid.
 - *"LORD, just show us the FATHER and we will be satisfied."*

Now we are so used to talking about GOD as "FATHER" that we might miss how extreme and perhaps irreverent Philip's request is.

- The reverence of the Jews was so great that they would not even speak the name of GOD aloud, much less use it as a casual expression as we do today.
 - Yet here is Philip asking to actually *see* GOD. Why?
 - Because Philip is afraid and wants comfort and assurance and security, no matter how extreme or outlandish or ridiculous those things may be.

What JESUS offers Philip and the rest is not certainty:

- in the face of a false spirit of fear: JESUS offers them a real SPIRIT.
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"Whoever has seen me has seen the FATHER."

- JESUS came in order that we might know that GOD is love,
 - that GOD's love is big enough for everything in the whole world,
 - and that GOD loves us and the whole world so much that GOD would go to any length—even to the point of death on the cross—
 - so that we would know that love,
 - feel that love,
 - and be empowered by that love to live with courage and hope.
- And it is the work of the HOLY SPIRIT to come along side of us whenever we are tempted to forget those things and give into the fears that swell around us.
- ¹⁶ *"I will ask the FATHER, and HE will give you another ADVOCATE, to be with you forever.*
- ¹⁷ *This is the SPIRIT of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees HIM nor knows Him. You know HIM, because HE abides with you, and HE will be in you."*

We do not have to give into the fears that creep into our minds and our lives.

- We have a promise from GOD that can overcome any fear that steps into our path.
 - *"The SPIRIT you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the SPIRIT you received brought about your adoption into sonship."*
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The Feast of St. Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans, was this past Monday.

- Beginning at the age of 17, having received visions of the archangel Michael, Joan joined and then led the French in battles against the English.
 - At 19, she was captured, tried and convicted as a heretic, and burned at the stake.
 - As the fires were lit around her, Joan asked a bishop who was present to hold the crucifix in front of her.
 - Joan kept her eyes on the cross of Christ, and as the fires rose, she called out the name of Jesus several times.
 - Faith gave Joan the courage to keep her eyes on Christ, even during this suffering and death.
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Today, we celebrate and give thanks for the gift of the HOLY SPIRIT,

- the real SPIRIT who came and who continues to come to remind us of GOD's love for us in JESUS,
- the ONE who comes amid all kinds of fears to remind us that the future is in GOD's hands,
- the ONE that calls us out of our places of fear—even and especially when it's understandable—
 - in order to serve and to speak and to act in love and courage and hope.

The most frequently spoken message in scripture—in fact 365 times—is "Be not afraid!"

- Mary heard it.
- The disciples heard it.
- The Christians in Rome heard it.
 - And we can hear it every time we turn to GOD, and call on the HOLY SPIRIT,
 - instead of giving into the fears that can cripple us.

"The SPIRIT you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the SPIRIT you received brought about your adoption into sonship."

- You are deeply and dearly loved by GOD and GOD has your future and no one or nothing else can take that from you.
 - Live in the joy of GOD's SPIRIT—the SPIRIT of courage.