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The Kingdom is within

"The human being is an animal who has the vocation to become God."²²

Our everyday lives are revealing. People, events and things are evocative. If we are awake to it we will come to know in the depths of our being that life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved. We will constantly discover that each moment carries the "more than". Life is always summoning us: "Keep listening! Keep searching! Continue the journey! Living is discovering! Life is promise not threat!"

Sacred Scripture offers us a resounding affirmation of this experience. It reveals to us that the Mystery behind the mystery of our days is One who loves us infinitely and unconditionally. Nor does the revelation stop there: the Mystery has been enfleshed in Jesus of Nazareth. Through him, with him and in him we "become participants of the divine nature". (2 Pet 1:4) This is our destiny. We find our human fulfilment in Jesus who is the Christ and this fulfilment is literally divine.

Second-century writer St Irenaeus sums it up nicely: "The Son of God was made human, so that we might become son of God."²³

Christian reality stands in direct contrast to the Greek mythology of Prometheus. One of his tasks was to steal "fire" from the gods and give it to humankind. The symbol of Pentecost is telling:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1-4)

No such act of "theft" is called for by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ and the sender of the Holy Spirit. The "fire" of life – divine life – is given freely. John's Gospel recalls the promise:

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. (Jn 14:18-20)

John's Gospel speaks of this in terms of being "born from above". (See Jn 3:3-8) Paul speaks of it as a "new creation":

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Cor 5:17. See also Gal 6:15)

This is the work of Baptism. In and through Baptism we become Christians – Christ Persons. It is from this act of "being born from above", becoming a "new creation", that I now derive my identity as a human being, one destined to live the life of God:

By the grace of baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," we are called to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity, here on earth in the obscurity of faith, and after death in eternal light. (Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 265)

For reflection

Take each text on its own and read it slowly and reflectively. Listen with the ear of the heart. Pause from time to time and listen to any movement within, whether it be a movement of resonance or resistance. Let the process lead you to some kind of words with God.

“The Word became flesh to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet 1:4): ‘For this is why the Word became human, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that we, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God’ (St Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III:19). ‘For the Son of God became a human being so that we might become God’ (St Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54:3). ‘The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made human, might make us gods’ (St Thomas Aquinas, *Opusculum*, 57:1–4).” (CCC 460)

“The countless lamps which are burning were all lit at the same fire, that is to say they were all lighted and are all shining through the action of one and the same substance. Thus Christians shine brilliantly through the action of the divine fire, the Son of God. Their lamps that have been lit are in the depths of their heart and they shine in his presence during the time they spend on earth, just as he himself shines brilliantly.”²⁴

“‘The kingdom of God is within you’ (Lk 17:21). From this we learn that by a heart made pure ... we see in our own beauty the image of the godhead ... You have in you the ability to see God. He who formed you put in your being an immense power. When God created you he enclosed in you the image of his perfection, as the mark of a seal is impressed on wax. But your straying has obscured God’s image ... You are like a metal coin: on the whetstone the rust disappears. The coin was dirty, but now it reflects the brightness of the sun and shines in its turn. Like the coin, the inward part of the personality, called the heart by our Master, once rid of the rust that hid its beauty, will rediscover the first likeness and be real ... So when people look at themselves, they will see in themselves the One they are seeking. And this is the joy that will fill their purified hearts. They are looking at their own translucency and finding the model in the image. When the sun is looked at in a mirror, even without any raising of the eyes to heaven, the sun’s brightness is seen in the mirror exactly as if the sun’s disc itself were being looked at. You cannot contemplate the reality of the light; but if you rediscover the beauty of the image that was put in you at the beginning, you will obtain within yourself the goal of your desires ... The divine image will shine brightly in us in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory throughout all ages.”²⁵

For practice

There is a type of question we might call an open question. It does not seek an answer so much as a different way of thinking or a broader perspective or a new attitude to the issue at hand. The response to an open question is to listen – to listen with the ear of the heart. Before an open question we resist the temptation to give an answer. We wait attentively, alert to any movement of thought or feeling. In the coming days use this process to ask the following as open questions: What is happening? What matters? What do you want?

