

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

We dwell in time and God dwells in eternity. How can we build a bridge over such an infinite gulf? The answer is in the feast that we are preparing to celebrate: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).

The theologian Nicholas Cabasilas has written that there were three walls that stood between us and God: the wall of *nature*, since God is spirit and we are flesh; the wall of *sin*; and the wall of *death*. The first of these walls was torn down through the Incarnation when divine nature and human nature became united in the person of Christ. The second wall of sin was torn down on the cross, and the third wall of death was torn down through the resurrection. Jesus Christ is now the definitive place of the encounter between the living God and a living human being. In him the far-off God has drawn near to us, Emmanuel, God-with-us. The living God no longer speaks to us through an intermediary but in person.

Now it is no longer human beings who are in search of the living God - it is the living God who has descended to seek human beings so that he could dwell in their hearts. From now on, Christ is the place in which one can encounter and worship "in spirit and truth."

Jesus still continues to reveal the Father in the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is now the Spirit of the Risen One, the Spirit who continues and carries out the work of the earthly Jesus. It is the Spirit who gives life to the idea of God and to our pursuit of him. Human reason, marked as it is by sin, is not enough by itself. "No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:11). The Holy Spirit is that invisible space in which God himself appears as a living and active reality. The living God is a "God who breathes," and the Holy Spirit is his breath.

Since Christ's resurrection, one can enter into contact with him and experience his sanctifying action: Christ now lives "in the Spirit" (see Rom 1:4; 1 Pet 3:18). The Holy Spirit is "the breath of the Risen One" in history. He is the one who creates in the depths of a person that state of grace through which one experiences a great "illumination" one day and discovers that God exists. Millions of Christians in our time have had this personal experience that is called "Baptism of the Spirit."

Here is how one of the first people in the Catholic Church who had that experience described its effects to a friend:

Our faith has come alive, our believing has become a kind of knowing. Suddenly, the world of the supernatural has become more real than the natural. In brief, Jesus Christ is a real person to us, a real person who is Our Lord and who is active in our lives. We read the New Testament as though it were literally true now, every word, every line. Prayer and the sacraments have become truly our daily bread instead of practices which we recognize as "good for us." A love of Scripture, a love of the Church I never thought possible, a transformation of our relationships with others, a need and a power of witness beyond all expectation, have all become part of our lives. The initial experience of the "Baptism of the Spirit" was not at all emotional, but life has become suffused with calm, confidence, joy, and peace. (Testimony quoted in Patti Gallagher Mansfield, "As by a New Pentecost.")

Paraphrased and condensed from "No one has ever seen God" Third Advent sermon by Fr Raniero Cantalamessa 21st December 2018. <http://www.cantalamesa.org/?p=3670&lang=en>