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**This Holy Mystery: Inspiration**

This week, we turn in our Lenten worship series on Communion to the work of the Holy Spirit in this sacred meal. Too often, dedicated conversations on the Holy Spirit are reserved for Pentecost – the day where we celebrate the outpouring of the Spirit on the new Christian community, what we've come to call the birthday of the church. I don't believe we give the Holy Spirit the air time it deserves... after all, this is the dimension of God that I would argue we have the most interaction with. In my own understanding of God, the Holy Spirit is always present and at work within us as individuals and together as the Body of Christ. The Spirit inspires and strengthens us, prays with and for us when we can't find the words, nudges us into action and deeper reflection. For me, the Spirit is God's inner working within us on a daily basis!

At our house, we've just started introducing our girls to the Star Wars series, in preparation for our upcoming trip to Hollywood Studios at the end of April. As we're re-watching each of the episodes and hearing the words of Yoda about the dark side and the light, and the force that flows through the universe, I'm realizing again how well those themes resonate with spirituality and our faith in God's presence – especially my understanding of the Holy Spirit. For me, the Spirit is the force that is with us always. The divine power that we can tap into and gain strength, wisdom, courage, and inspiration from. In the 2016 Star Wars Story, *Rogue One*, there is a character who repeats over and over a mantra that communicates the ever-present nature of the Holy Spirit... "I am one with the force, the force is with me. I am one with the force, the force is with me." I almost imagine myself chanting a similar mantra, "I am one with the Spirit, the Spirit is with me."

When we are one with the Spirit, we are in close connection and communion with the "force"... the divine presence that exists all around us. We are connected to the God who created all things, the liberating love of Christ that frees us from all that binds, and the Spirit that inspires and enlivens. This force is constantly present and working within us, especially through the Holy Spirit; the question is whether we are listening, whether we are open to what the Spirit reveals to us and to our world.

Throughout my journey, I have not always been as open to or aware of the Spirit's work within me. During the time that I disconnected from the church, in my college years, I

didn't give much thought to God's presence or desires for my life. I still had faith and always trusted God, but that's not really where my focus and attention was... I was busy studying and wrestling with my future plans, what classes to take each semester, what major to declare... and how was I supposed to balance it all, between school and work and friends and family? I wasn't all that concerned on what God wanted from or for me... But I look back and I can see the wrestling that I was unintentionally and unconsciously having with my call to ministry and love for science... I took classes like, "Healing: Sacred and Secular" when I was contemplating being a doctor, and "Intro to Moral Theory" (the study of what is right and wrong) as my basic philosophy requirement. One summer break, I spent a week in New Orleans with the Young Adults from my mom's church cleaning up and working on houses after Hurricane Katrina. In hind sight, the Holy Spirit was nudging and inspiring me all throughout my journey, but I didn't open myself up to see and feel it until I realized how much I missed the church community – and found myself reengaging in worship through the praise band and a talking about my faith in a small group study.

While God never left me, I had disconnected myself from the source. I can see now that the Spirit was working within me, trying to draw me back into a deeper relationship and reliance on God. Listening for and growing in the Spirit takes intentionality and an activeness of faith, making use of what we call the "means of grace" – prayer, worship, talking about your faith with others, searching the scriptures, and partaking in the sacraments, to name a few. Through this intentional working on our faith, we may more deeply experience the Spirit's presence and power and listen for what the Spirit reveals to us of God's will and desire for our lives. I wonder what your practice is? Whether you intentionally listen for the Spirit's guidance in your life and faith, or are just trucking along unaware of the way God is working within you...

One of those means of grace that I mentioned, which helps us to grow in our faith and our experience of the Holy Spirit are the sacraments, particularly Holy Communion. Much of the focus of communion is typically on Jesus and his life and death, particularly as we commemorate this Last Supper and remember the words he shared with his disciples. But the meaning of this sacrament would not be complete if we didn't also take into account the work that the Spirit is doing as we gather at this meal.

In a communion service, the words toward the end of the liturgy, called the epiclesis, call on the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon the gifts of bread and cup, and on those gathered to share in the meal. These words invoke the Spirit, in order that the church might be inspired and renewed, led into faithful living in the world. While the epiclesis holds words of invocation, an invitation for the Spirit to come among us, there is at the same time a recognition that the Spirit is already present and working within us... whether we are aware of it or not. This invocation should possibly then be phrased as "open us to receive your Spirit's blessing, which is surely already active within us." When we call upon the Spirit, we are calling US to recognize that the Spirit is at work, strengthening and nudging us along to a closer walk with God and more faithful living with our neighbor.

The Spirit not only connects us with God and each other, but it also sends us forth into the world! The Spirit calls forth action. As we come to the table to remember all that Jesus

was and is for us, we are filled with the Spirit's presence, renewed and refreshed, so that as we go back out into the world to live our faith.

As we come to the communion table today, may we come with an eagerness of heart and spirit, ready and willing to open ourselves to the movement and work of the Spirit of God within and through us. May you truly feel and live each day with the mantra of constant communion... "I am one with the Spirit, and the Spirit is with me"... at this table of grace, and in all times and places. Amen.