

Spirit

As it is written
in Isaiah the prophet: “Behold,
I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’” John the Baptist
appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins
People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem
were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they
acknowledged their sins. And this is what he proclaimed: “One mightier than I
is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.
I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the holy Spirit.”

The beginning of the Good News proclaimed by Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, is rooted in the history of Israel: Malachi (3:1) declared that God would send his messenger to purify the priests and the Temple, and Isaiah (40:3) told the Israelites to prepare to end their exile by turning from sin and returning to the Lord.

We “pagans,” the disciples of the Jewish Jesus, are also included in this story. It is the story of God’s love toward his people and the action he took so that we could all participate in that love. This story continues with John the Baptist, who was sent to immerse the Jewish people in the waters of the Jordan so that they might be cleansed of their sins and undergo a conversion of heart. The Lord once again became present in history—this time in a complete and definitive way—begging his people to stop sinning and to follow him by establishing a proper relationship with their brothers and sisters. The people welcomed what the Lord proposed to them through John, who lived as an ascetic in the desert, entrusting himself to the Lord. The desert is not hospitable to life, but life was nevertheless present there. It was in the desert that the Lord taught his people as they journeyed from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. It was on the banks of the Jordan that John proclaimed the coming of one who was mightier than himself: he would not baptize with water (which symbolically cleansed the heart), but with the Spirit of the Lord so as to renew the hearts of those who accepted his invitation to change their lives.

It is the Lord who takes the initiative by giving his Spirit, as Jeremiah (31:31-34) and Ezekiel (36:24-32) foretold. Jesus lives in the Spirit of the Father: he immerses us in his own Spirit, introducing us into the mystery of God so that we can live in his love and by his love.

*Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:
all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

*The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood,
but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity.
It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of
community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of
goods by a few (EG 188).*