God learns.

That truth calls out to us from the heart of our faith, the Incarnation. God might have thought, “I’m just going to go there, where my human creatures live, and teach them a lesson, once and for all.”

And, like all good teachers, God learned while teaching.

Years ago I struggled with this, weighing God’s perfection, omniscience, and omnipotence against the clear evidence, biblical and otherwise, that God learns.

Jesus in one instance was out-argued by a Phoenician woman who told him she might be a dog in some people’s view, but she can still eat the crumbs under the table.

God decides after the Flood that total destruction is not the answer and promises Noah that never again will such destruction be wrought on the world, having learned that it did not, in fact, teach humans a lesson, but that we are inclined to make bad choices, as part of our nature.

Jesus tells his followers that he came into the world to save the lost sheep of Israel. But he didn’t seem to know that his influence, his teaching, his grace and love, could not be kept from the Samaritans or the Gentiles or anybody else, even in the short term.

Curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers and casting our demons couldn’t be kept under wraps.

By the time Paul came along, just short while later, he was already writing that there are no Jews or Greeks, slave or free, male or female, because we are all brought to life by one Spirit, one God.

Even writing in that vein Paul harbored some of his own prejudices and biases, just as we—in our enlightened era of openness and freedom and scientific neutrality—harbor ours.

But those words between the words, thoughts between the thoughts, could not be contained. Paul said more than he knew he was saying. Jesus too, it would seem. And we cannot contain those deeper thoughts and truths in our time either.

Nothing is so threatening to our inner . . . what? . . . demons? . . . bigotry? . . . pride? . . .as the thought that we might have to give up some of the control we have, or think we have, to cede territory we always have thought was ours. Define “we” and “ours” as you like.

This is true within every one of us as we struggle against the flight to freedom of our most loving, creative selves. The staid and proper and well-mannered parts will, coolly at first and cruelly if the coolness fails, use any means at our disposal to convince ourselves that the most important thing is the status quo. Particularly if the status quo has benefitted us in the past, allowed us to be more comfortable, less troubled, even when we *ought* to feel troubled by that other suffering part of ourselves that seeks to break out from the oppression of the safer parts.

The Holy Spirit does not seem to be a fan of the status quo. Rather, she pushes us to open the heart within us, to give light and air to the stifled parts of ourselves.

We already know that this is not only an inner struggle, but also an outer one. To use Paul’s brilliant image of the Church as the Body of Christ with many parts—to expand that to the Body of God’s children everywhere in all circumstances—the same struggle obtains. Those parts of the body—individual humans—who benefit from the status quo will always fight to maintain that state of affairs or attempt to turn back time to regain it.

But the Holy Spirit will have none of that. Progress will be made, even if it comes in a way that doesn’t look like progress at first, at least to those who resist the Holy Spirit’s relentless march—or dance—into the future.

Today is June 14. I grew up, from my Boy Scout days onward, knowing that date as Flag Day in our country.

It wasn’t until 1975, at the age of 28, that I discovered there’s another less familiar, more ancient commemoration on this day. I learned it then because I was ordained a deacon on that day, the Feast of St. Basil the Great.

Basil and his brother Gregory and their friend (another Gregory) came to be known as the Cappadocian Fathers; they fought for the Nicene faith of the Church in the fourth century, for the Holy Trinity whom we commemorated last Sunday.

Specifically, Basil fought for the Church to hold fast to the divinity of Christ (against those Arians, whom I mentioned last week) and most importantly for the unequivocal truth of the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. He championed the cause of our proclaiming “Glory to the Father with the Son together with the Holy Spirit” instead of some weaker construction, relegating the Holy Spirit to some demigod status.

I know that sounds a bit abstruse and far removed from our present reality. It even sounds a bit like fighting to hold onto the status quo. But it’s not any of those things. It’s real and concrete and present—acknowledging that some invisible force is as real an expression of God as a flesh-and-blood man embodying both divine and human natures.

Basil was not clinging to an old doctrine in order to preserve a status quo, but fighting with all his might and God’s grace to establish the truth of a God who cannot be captured by, nor contained within, mere human logic and human constructs. He was leading the Church to embrace a force too wild to be held within that embrace.

Whether Basil intended it or not, nor Paul, nor Jesus, nor Moses, they proclaimed a God who teaches us and learns from us, the God who evidently is willing to allow us to learn through means that are sometimes scary and nearly always challenging.

This is my attempt (within God’s grace, I trust) to urge us all—you and me—to move through these days with wonder and faith and expectancy, full of the well-founded hope that God, who will not be tamed by us, will lead us into all truth as God alone can, and God has always done.

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