

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

If you had the opportunity to have a conversation with Jesus, what would you ask him? If Jesus were to knock on your door and have a cup of coffee with you, what would you talk about? Would you ask him about the future? Would you ask him about loved ones that have passed away?

In our story today, Nicodemus had that opportunity. Jesus has entered Jerusalem with a big splash. In John's Gospel, Jesus enters Jerusalem at the beginning of his ministry not toward the end and overturns the money changers tables. After that confrontation at the Temple, Jesus became the talk of the town. Everyone wondered about this young upstart from the country. Most of the Jewish authorities began to see Jesus as a threat but Nicodemus was different.

Nicodemus was an older man. The Bible says that he was a ruler or a leader of the Jews, which probably meant that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. This was the same group that would try and convict Jesus in a few years. So Nicodemus was a prominent man in the community. He had spent most of his life studying the Torah or the Law of Moses, which we know today as the first five books of the Old Testament. So he was extremely well versed in the laws of the Jewish people, who believed their salvation depended on learning and keeping the laws set forth by God. They were concerned about the physical world and their actions in this world.

This is the mindset that Nicodemus had when he went to find Jesus. His mind was focused on the physical world, not on spiritual things. So he goes out at night, because he dare not endanger his reputation by being seen talking with Jesus. When he finds Jesus what should he say, he pays Jesus a compliment. He says that Jesus must be sent from God, because no one can do the things Jesus does apart from the power of God.

Jesus responds not with a "thank you"; instead, he really confounds Nicodemus by saying "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God". Can you imagine the look on Nicodemus' face? Nicodemus doesn't understand what Jesus is talking about because Jesus and Nicodemus are thinking on different levels. Nicodemus has spent his entire life focused on the physical world, whereas Jesus is speaking of the spiritual realm.

We remember on Palm Sunday the people cheered Jesus because they thought he was the new David sent to reclaim the kingdom of Israel on Earth, but in fact he came to usher in a new kingdom of God, a kingdom not of the physical but of the spiritual. The same thing was happening to Nicodemus, when Jesus said kingdom of God, Nicodemus probably thought Jesus was talking about the kingdom of Israel on Earth. Nicodemus thought when Jesus said “born again”, he meant a physical birth. Nicodemus was imagining his mother giving birth to him now as an old man and was baffled. His mind was on the physical but Jesus was talking about the Spiritual.

There is a big difference between the physical world of the flesh and the heavenly world of the Spirit, which Jesus calls the Kingdom of God. This might seem an unnecessary statement but so many times we fail to fully understand what Jesus is saying because our minds are locked in the physical world and so we don't understand things spiritually. The Kingdom of God is a new way of thinking and a new way of seeing. The physical world is full of violence and hatred; is full of injustice and sorrow. We see the effects of the physical world, every day on the news. Those in the physical world are programmed for selfishness. They believe that the only thing that is important is themselves and their happiness, with no concern for others. The physical world is full of conflict and war. The Kingdom of God is a place of peace. It is a place where the Bible tells us no tears fall and no sadness is known. There is no pain, no sickness, and all people are treated like equals. It is the place that we have to look forward to. The Kingdom of God is that place where the light of Christ is always around us. It is through spiritual not physical means that we will enter into this Kingdom of God.

That is what Nicodemus could not understand. He had spent his whole life keeping these physical laws in order to gain entrance to God's kingdom. We have to die to this world and be reborn in the Spirit. That is how the connection is made with God and that is how we gain entrance to the Kingdom of God.

We must focus our minds on the Spiritual before we can truly understand what God wants for us in our lives. It is through the Spirit that we communicate with God. We can't do this by physical means. We can't call God on his mobile phone or send him an e-mail. Prayer is the way that we talk to God and prayer is done through the Spirit. Even though we speak the words out loud or to ourselves, it is the Holy Spirit in us that connects us with God. God knows what we will ask before we even ask it because we are connected to God through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus used the metaphor of birth to describe this change from the physical to the spiritual. He does this because like a new baby has to grow physically, so do we have to grow spiritually after our rebirth. We have to crawl before we walk, we have to walk before we run, and along the way there will be times when we slip and fall. The awesome thing is that the God we serve is always there to pick us up and set us back on our feet. He is infinitely patient with us, but just like with a child, he wants to see us grow continually.

Jesus told Nicodemus that it was God's Spirit that would enable this new birth to happen. We don't have the capacity to make this transformation happen in ourselves. We can only open ourselves to the Spirit who works within us. As we travel through Lent to the foot of the cross, I pray that we will open ourselves to the Spirit's transforming work in our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.