

Sixth Thursday of Easter ~ 5/17

"Are you discussing among yourselves what I meant when I said, 'A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'? Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy." (John 16:19-20)

People who have walked the path of pain and found joy at the end of the trail might be able to understand better than anyone else might how ashes can become fire. Anyone who has known heartache because in their efforts to be true to God's calling they have experienced the rejection of friends and family will know that joy comes in the morning, in the light of God's new day. Those who weep and mourn when the powers of evil triumph will eventually rejoice in the victory of Jesus Christ.

Pain and joy are mysteriously connected in the presence of Christ. As we begin to grow in our relationship with God we often find consolation and peace. God is with us and we are content to follow Him. But growth in our relationship with God means that at times He will seem to be absent. We will feel lonely, and that loneliness will be painful. We will look at the world that only yesterday seemed so friendly and find that today we are hated. We will not be able to understand why God has abandoned us when we were trying so hard to follow His lead. God will really not be gone from our lives but it will feel that way. These are the painful times that remind us that we are not complete without God. These are the times of our lives when we face the really hard situations and must muddle through them with only our faith to hold on to because God is silent. In these times growth happens in the dark places and spaces of our heart. And without these times we will never come to know a deeper reliance on Jesus and we will never know true joy.

When the joy comes, when we see the face of Christ clearly once again, we will realize that the fire of the Spirit has been alive and well in our hearts all along. We will also come to realize that it is burning more brightly. The Spirit's blaze is radiating out to our neighbors in a way that wasn't evident before we held on with our fingertips of faith through the painful times.

Let us hold on when hope seems gone; let us continue to give when the source of giving seems absent and let us sift through the ashes of our world to see if we can find the seeds of joy sprouting.

Questions for Reflection

- 1. Looking back over my life can I see how the painful times have strengthened my belief in the faithful love of God?*
- 2. Have I ever started to feel joy emerging in my life even while pain was still present?*

Prayer: Christ Jesus, in a little while we may know sorrow or joy. Help us to find you in both experiences.