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Our need for purity to connect with the Paraclete

Many years ago, I heard someone pray this prayer: “O Jesus, remove the unclean scab of sensual corruption that covers my heart, so that I can feel and readily follow the breath of the Paraclete in my soul.” These words can help us understand how God wants us to celebrate the feast of Pentecost that this year falls on Sunday 19th May.

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Jesus ascended into heaven so that he could send the Holy Spirit: “I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever.” Ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven—fifty days after Easter—the Holy Spirit came down from heaven as tongues of fire. A powerful wind shook the whole house, signalling the Paraclete’s new presence in the world.

We tend to make several false assumptions about the Holy Spirit because of these signs. We might assume his presence will be something that overwhelms us. We might assume such power will make his presence so obvious that we will necessarily feel it, even physically.

To help avoid such mistake's God gave Elijah a foretaste of what Christians should expect. He did this by revealing his presence while the prophet was hiding in a cave on Mount Sinai. God was not in the mighty wind. God was not in the earthquake. God was not in the fire. "And after the fire there came the sound of a gentle breeze." Finally, in that breeze, Elijah realised that God had shown himself to him: "He covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave." He wanted to be closer to God. God spoke to him and sent him on a mission to anoint a new king.

Perhaps now we understand the prayer I mentioned earlier. To feel the Paraclete working in our soul, we need total purity. His presence is like the gentle breeze that Elijah experienced on the mountain.

If our hearts are covered with “crust”—with the leftovers of sensual habits like getting drunk, watching pornography, committing acts of impurity, using drugs or indulging in useless fantasies—how can we possibly feel the presence of the Holy Spirit?

It’s not enough to say, “I’m sorry for all those sins.” Such sins leave something behind. One is consumed by a thirst for sins of the flesh. It’s the “scab” on a wound that is still healing. That is why we need to become souls of prayer, asking Jesus to cleanse us and fill us with the Holy Spirit. We begin to understand why he promised: “Blessed are the pure of heart, they shall see God.”

This article by Fr. Joe Babendreier first appeared in the Sunday Nation in May 2012.

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