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Reflection
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Today is the memorial of St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen. Basil and Gregory were close friends. They fought Arianism, a fourth century heresy that denied the full divinity of Christ. Their voices prepared the way of the Lord. Gregory became a great preacher. Basil challenged people to live simply, emphasized the importance of community, and was a persistent advocate for social justice, especially care for the poor. Both are good models for us in our time.

Today's scripture has some key lines: in the letter from John he encourages us to let what we have heard from the beginning remain in us; we need to "remain in the Father and the Son, and to know what God has promised: that what is promised us is: eternal life" In an era when the divinity of Christ was being denied, this is an important aspect of our faith.

In the gospel of John, John the Baptist saw his mission as preparing for the one who is to come. When he was asked, "who are you?" He answered "I prepare the way of the Lord. There is someone whom you do not recognize, who is coming after me." With humility he admits, "I am not worthy to untie his sandal strap." He always points to this 'other.' John the Baptist made ready the way of the Lord by simplicity, directness, humility, austerity, and a call to conversion. He confessed he was not the Messiah or Elijah. He says "I baptize with water. One is coming after me that will baptize with the Holy Spirit."

The questions they ask John the Baptist make us ask similar questions. How do I fit into God's plan? Am I a witness to God's work in me? Am I a disciple? Do I feel compelled to tell the good news, to act, to give, to love like Jesus loves? The readings today challenge us to think about new beginnings. The last line is a challenge: "One is coming after me who will baptize you in the Holy Spirit..."

Not long ago, I attended one of the *Elephants in the Living Room* talks. The speaker was Dan Horan, a Franciscan who teaches at St. Mary's ND and who writes newspaper columns in the NCR. His topic was: *The State of the Church in Contemporary Culture*. He talked about the Synod and the importance of **listening**

to the young. Horan spoke at a pre-synod meeting in 2018 in which the Pope asked the young about their faith, their questions and what they were looking for from the Church. There were many themes, but one thing struck me in his talk about the problems in the contemporary Church. He called it the persistence of “Holy Spirit atheism.” In other words, people don’t believe in the Holy Spirit. He said, people seem to be full of fear, even though in the Old Testament we hear the words many times: “Do not fear, I am with you,” and Jesus said many times in the gospels, “Fear not, do not be afraid, I am with you.”

We fear because we don’t really **believe** in the Holy Spirit. We think everything is up to us. We must believe. We don’t ask the Spirit to be with us, we fail to call on the Holy Spirit! For example, in the Church there is a failure to recognize the *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful), there is a failure to listen to the “faith of the people”, to listen to how the Holy Spirit is moving people, the mass of people.

We are all the Church. We need to learn, educate, share and pray together. That is Pope Francis’ purpose in gathering people in Synod: To listen to the Spirit in each other, the family of believers. To dialogue, to listen. Jesus tells the disciples regarding the hungry crowd at the feeding of the 5000, “You feed them!” We need to find our own authority; and not wait for supposed leaders.

Come Holy Spirit! Renew the face of the earth. How often we have heard those words, but... We need to take the words more seriously, the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives at each moment. We need to trust the Holy Spirit. **It’s time to continue in our own way, God’s creative work.**

These ideas can be a challenge for us to think about as we begin a new year.

What about me? Do I really believe in the Holy Spirit? Do I really believe that the Holy Spirit is the gift of the Risen Christ? Do I really believe that the Holy Spirit is at work today in our Church, in our Pope Francis, in our Community?

Come Holy Spirit!