

Ready to Die for Christ Upside Down?

PENTECOST

Jesus chose twelve disciples to be his close companions during his three years of ministry before his death and resurrection. We might suppose that being so close to the Lord for three years would totally transform a person into a saint. However, after three years with Jesus, Simon Peter denied three times that he had ever met Him. It seems that being close to Jesus did not transform Peter immediately.

But then one night, Peter radically changed and never denied Jesus again and even died a most gruesome death crucified upside down! What a transformation! What did it? On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit transformed the Apostles into fearless witnesses to the love of Jesus Christ. The Apostles' fear was overcome by a stronger love for Jesus. When one truly loves a person, things that used to be frightening are not frightening anymore.

The birth of the Church at Pentecost reveals to us how important the power of the Holy Spirit is in our lives and in the life of the Church. The Spirit can transform us, but not without our consent. Peter was radically changed at Pentecost not because the Holy Spirit is more powerful than Jesus (for Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God). Rather, Peter was transformed at Pentecost because he was finally receptive to God's transforming love. How did he become receptive? Peter had many humbling experiences of his own failures. He both recognized that he needed to be transformed and consented to being transformed into a witness to God's love and truth.

Peter's transformation could only have happened through the Holy Spirit who guides the Church. The Church is the instrument of the Holy Spirit. So, if we know we need to be transformed and desire to be transformed, we need to be in the Church so that the Holy Spirit can transform us. The Second Vatican Council tells us that the Holy Spirit "was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church" (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 4). It is essential to note that the Holy Spirit was sent to sanctify the Church. To sanctify something means to make it holy, or in other words, to make it like God who is total holiness and who shows us what a holy person looks like in the lives of both Jesus and his mother, Mary. Further, the Holy Spirit was sent to make the Church *continually* holy. This means that the Church is now, always was, and always will be holy.

In order to become like St. Peter, we need to have transformational Pentecost moments every day through prayer, full participation at Mass, and regular confession. As Peter was able to receive God's transforming love only after recognition of his sins, may we ask the Holy Spirit to be a witness to the truth about our own sinfulness so that we can be perfectly open to transformation away from sin and toward the life of love and truth that Jesus lived!

Q. Do I desire to be transformed like Peter was even to the point of death upside-down on a cross?

Q. Do I believe that the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church and guides her through the Pope and Bishops as He did so powerfully that day at Pentecost?

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