

I want to say something about Jesus taking on our human nature which in these days of pandemic can appear pretty frail. People everywhere are getting sick. Doctors and nurses that take care of us are getting sick too. It's scary and we would like to know when it's going to end. But we don't know.

The gospel wants to remind us that we have access to powerful and lifegiving resources - even in the face of death. Jesus showed the way. Paul put it like this, "*taking the form of a slave...he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death.*" Which is to say, nothing, not even death, is greater than the gifts of the spirit.

Isaiah describes one of the powers given us, "*The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.*" We are strengthened by words. Remember, when Jesus was famished at the end of his forty day fast, the devil said to him, "*you can make bread from these stones.*" Jesus answered him, "*we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" A word can sustain us.

In November 1996, I visited my dad in Fort Collins. Mom had already died, three and a half years earlier. I was worried about tensions in my parish. I didn't talk about it with him but came home to New York sustained and strengthened. That visit gave me courage. Reminded me that I was loved. Love is the word of God.

Paul tells about an intimate resource from God, "*let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...*" In a short paragraph Paul translated the essence of Jesus's incarnation, "*he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness...and became obedient to the point of death.*" Paul wanted us to see and know, through his words, the mind of Christ. There it is. There is the universe of Christ. There is his mind. Obeying God is merged with the simple act of listening that is also hearing what is said. That is a feat of the mind. Insight reshapes the whole world. Insight reshapes us, no longer merely physical beings but eternal spirits being made ready for eternal life. We're born of water and the spirit. That makes us whole.

I don't know where I heard this expression, "*we are not human beings having a spiritual experience but spiritual beings having a human experience.*" I might have seen it on a bumper sticker. That is just what Christ did, a spiritual being having a human experience. The arch human experience is death. We can be like him. That is the way to the mind of Christ. That is the way to freedom.

Matthew's gospel pictures the messiness of life. What happened to Jesus could be anyone who stands accused but doesn't have powerful friends. Pilate - who didn't know Jesus - was puzzled by Jesus's simple, unwordy replies. Puzzled by his silence. Pilate wasn't stupid. He perceived the jealousy in the religious leaders. He listened to his wife say, "*Have nothing to do with this innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.*" Every married man knows to listen to his wife. He didn't see that washing his hands of Jesus wouldn't absolve his complicity.

The situation quickly spiraled out of control. Unable to stop the crowds or redirect their energy, Pilate let Jesus be condemned, mocked, tortured and, finally, crucified. Hanging on the cross, Jesus lamented, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

Jesus looked pretty frail through the trial - his replies to authorities, his stumbling walk to Golgotha and painful crucifixion. We are also him. The powers and resources that God gives are real but invisible - a different invisibility from COVID-19. God's powers and resources persist through frailty and death. They are conveyed through words and silences. They waken us.

Come together - six feet apart - to walk where Jesus walked. To listen and hear God's word. To know the same mind that is his. To be alert to what makes us the apple of God's eye, God's joy whom he would give everything to find fully alive.