

"Empty or Full?" – September 17, 2017
by Wayne J. Schneider - Je veux t'offrir mon Coeur.

"Empty or Filled?"

St. Matthew 26:36-40

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked his disciples to stay awake and pray with him on this excruciating evening, when events are about to go sour. Jesus goes off by himself to request that God would release him from the impending agony. When he returns to his disciples, he finds them asleep. He awakens them with the statement, "*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*"

We understand that prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace comes to us through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. God initiates all of this but asks for a response from us. The Body of Christ is not in the religion business; it is in the Gospel-sharing business. And the Gospel is the "Good News" that all of our fuss over our relationship with God is unnecessary, because God, in the mystery of the Word who is Jesus, has already fixed it up.

Child development is a good illustration of this relationship with God. When a baby is born into a loving home, the child is well cared for. In this nurturing environment, their emotional and physical needs are met. They are fed on time, cleaned regularly, and loved unconditionally. By the age of two, their perceptions begin to change. They start to comprehend the link between their actions and the reactions of the adults who care for them.

What they require is still provided, but there is now a 'quid pro quo.' If they want something to eat, they need to ask for it nicely. If they want a different toy to play with, they need to pick up the other toys first. All of their actions demand a response. In the same way with God's actions in our lives; they require us to work on God's call to a faithful life.

The way our desires are weak is effortless to see. Since the beginning of creation to today, there are billions of examples of human weakness. We are often selfish, keying on our needs rather than on the needs of others. Sometimes, we are even rude and prideful, trying for the most and the best at any cost. We quickly become angered, seeking ways to argue or disagree. Our flesh is weak, and yet God continues to desire to be in a relationship with each of us, wanting us to respond to the Holy Spirit living in us.

On the other side, the way the Holy Spirit is willing is also easy to spot. In the middle of chaos, when everything appears to be falling apart, a simple prayer for peace helps clarify the situation and brings calmness. A key to seeing the work of the Holy Spirit is to slow down our hearts, minds, and spirits long enough to become present in the moment.

If we spiritually stand still long enough, we may hear the Holy Spirit reminding us that it is unnecessary for us to gear-up to some acceptable level of moral improvement for God to forgive us. God moves before we do. He gives life in joy freely and fully with no conditions whatsoever. Or, as Robert Farrar Capon said, "*There is no single note of earning or merit, not one breath about rewarding the rewardable, correcting the correctable, or improving the improvable.*"

When we react, we are filled with the Spirit and are enabled to act with God in our lives in various ways. In worship we praise; in prayer we listen and speak with God, communicating our thoughts. We learn through Holy Scriptures the words of life that transform us. We share together around the Lord's Table, discovering our oneness in Jesus. Our lives create fruit. Jesus said, "*I am the vine you are the branches...that bear fruit.*" When we are filled with the Spirit, we produce fruit: "*Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*" (Galatians 5:22-23a).

When we respond, God takes us a step further. We are called to share the Holy Spirit with others. 1 Corinthians 12 shows us that the Holy Spirit is revealed in various ways. Everyone one of us has at least one gift of the Spirit, and God entrusts

us to use these gifts as good stewards. The gifts of knowledge, wisdom, healing, prophecy and more, are all expressions of the one Spirit in many people. Each gift is to be an active part of building the Kingdom of God on earth.

Again, it is the grace of God that introduces us to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Then, we are called to respond to the work of the Spirit in our lives. As we react, we are filled with the incredible power and joy of the Holy Spirit. Alleluia. Amen.