

It seems so dramatic. So direct.
 The Lord says to Ezekiel, “Mortal, stand up on your feet
 and I will speak to you.”
 As [the Lord] spoke, Ezekiel reports,
 “a spirit entered into me
 and set me on my feet;
 and I heard him
 speaking
 to me.”

Ezekiel needed, physically, to be set on his feet
 at this point.
 Because the Lord has just grabbed his attention by sending him a vision
 of part-human-part-animal creatures
 who dart about with giant wheel.
 And when he saw all this,
 Ezekiel fell on his face.

The Lord, meanwhile,
 has a job for our prostrated friend Ezekiel.
 The Lord wants Ezekiel to go prophesy
 to the rebellious, imprudent, and stubborn
 people around him.

In order to get Ezekiel to do the prophetic task at hand,
 God needs to pick him up.
 To literally stand Ezekiel on his own two feet
 so that he can go, be sent to the people.

So, God sends a spirit to enter Ezekiel,
 and this spirit lifts him up.
 I like to imagine the spirit here like a mother swooping in
 and grabbing her toddler under the armpits to prop him up
 (but then again I have small children in my house).
 However, the Spirit accomplished getting Ezekiel on his feet,
 we know that God gives Ezekiel exactly what he needs
 in a dramatic, direct, one-time pounce.

It reminds me of people who've had direct, dramatic, personal
 encounters with the Holy Spirit.
 People in Scripture,
 like the Apostles on Pentecost, for whom God's spirit fills the whole house
 and alights on their heads and they speak in many languages.
 Or for James and Peter and John at the Transfiguration,

who get to see Jesus shine
and hear the words, “This is my beloved Son.”

But it reminds me not only of people in Scripture.
Ezekiel’s experience with the spirit reminds me of those of you
who’ve had dramatic, direct, one-time encounters with the Holy Spirit.
Those among us who’ve felt the Spirit lead them somewhere
at a certain time;
those for whom the Spirit has put someone—often a stranger—
with them at a key moment;
those who’ve had the Spirit put them *there* and not *there*
at a significant juncture in their lives.

I think of one time, visiting a congregant on hospice in her hospital room,
while talking with her family, her niece interrupted
and said, “I feel something. We should pray.”
So, we stood up, circled round, held hands,
and while we were saying the Lord’s Prayer,
she entered eternal life.

Yes, the Holy Spirit can set you on your feet at a moment’s notice.
The Holy Spirit can intervene with what you need
in one fell swoop.

But what about those of us
without such experiences?
Who’ve never heard the Holy Spirit speak to us
nor had her swoop in and pull or direct us?

Well, those folks are also in Scripture.
Queen Ester never directly encounters the Spirit
and she still stands up to injustice.
The Spirit never dramatically infuses
Mary Magdalene, or Mary the mother of James, or Salome
but they nonetheless haul pounds of spices
at the crack of dawn to Jesus’ dead body.

Yes, those without a dramatic, direct,
lift-you-up experience of the Holy Spirit
are also part of our shared faith,
featured even in our Scripture readings today.
Because Saint Paul is one of those people.

To understand a little more about Saint Paul,

you should know that he had, in fact,
 had *one-time special* encounter with the Risen Lord
 but it was *not* an experience
 that lifted him up.
 It was one that literally *knocked him down*
 while he was traveling on the road to Damascus.
 The Lord didn't elevate him for service
 as much as offer him a corrective kick in the be-hind
 in order to prepare him for his apostolic tasks.

So, although Saint Paul had has a grand one-day-only
 spiritual experience,
 it was not a seemingly *positive, elevating* experience.

No wonder, then, that Paul latches on to someone else's
 glorious vision of heaven.
 "I know a person in Christ," he writes to the Christians in Corinth,
 "who was caught up to the third heaven . . .
 [who] was caught up into Paradise
 and heard things that are not to be told,"
 things so holy and special and glorious, we can imagine,
 "that no mortal is permitted to repeat [them]."

Saint Paul has no such experience, he says.
 "On behalf of such a one I will boast,
 but on my own behalf
 I will not boast."

Perhaps Saint Paul wishes he *could* boast
 about a being caught up in the body or out of the body
 into some heavenly realm,
 but he does not have that Spirit-led experience.

What he does have, he goes on to say,
 is the Holy Spirit giving him
 strength to endure some kind of mundane
 day-to-day
 suffering.

"A thorn was given to me in the flesh,"
 he tells his friends and parishioners
 without offering more details.
 But we don't need to know what his fleshly thorn or affliction was
 in order to understand Saint Paul's point.

When describing the work of God and the Holy Spirit in his life,
 Saint Paul doesn't cite his conversion,
 or the time an angel sprung him out of jail,
 or all the miracles he saw or performed in Jesus' name.

No, when explaining how revelation from the Holy Spirit
 works for him,
 Paul cites his own pleading with God to take away his day-to-day suffering,
 and that suffering continuing to be there.

By his own account,
 Saint Paul is not someone who leads a charmed life.
 He is someone who occasionally just needs God's help
 to get on to his feet.

So, his experience of the Holy Spirit
 is the day-to-day strength to endure through his weakness
 because of God's grace.

“[The Lord] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you,
 for power is made perfect in weakness . . .’
 Therefore, whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”

Saint Paul shows us more important than his jailings and miracles and conversion
 is God's grace helping him to simply put one weak foot in front of the other.

And so it is for us.
 We who have had one-time, unforgettable,
 Ezekiel-type pick-me-ups from God.
 And we who lead uncharmed lives of quiet affliction
 and mundane weakness like Saint Paul.
 We all cry for the Holy Spirit to help get us on our feet.

And the *grace* is that God's Spirit does come.
 It's arrival might be dramatic.
 Or maybe quotidian.
 But Christ's grace is
 always
 and in all ways
 sufficient
 for you.

AMEN.