

In Middle School I was an avid student of astronomy. I read books. I knew the difference between the planets, stars, galaxies. I memorized the names of the brightest stars and the constellations. But eventually my passion cooled. Star-gazing (of course) takes place at night, and as I grew older, I wanted my sleep more than the stars.

But a hint of what I missed while sleeping was brought home to me one night in the Spring of 1976. Comet West had appeared in the heavens. There were stories in the newspapers giving the best times for viewing it. Unfortunately, the comet wouldn't rise in the east until after midnight. Too bad, I thought, but I wasn't getting up at 3:00AM – even to see a comet.

But one night during those months of Comet West's visit I suddenly woke up (I'm not sure why) to find that it was around four in the morning. And I remembered the comet. I could either get up – or stay in bed. I consciously made the decision to answer the invitation, because that's what it felt like, an invitation – or a summons. I threw on some clothes and tip-toed downstairs through the silent house and out into the backyard.

I still remember clearly, after 50 years, the feeling of that clear, soft, warm morning just before dawn. It was absolutely still and quiet. Standing bare footed on the grass, I looked up into the southeastern sky where I knew the comet should be. And there I encountered the comet. I say, “encountered” because the experience was strangely personal and powerful. The comet seemed huge, luminous, like a nozzle of a huge fire hose spraying jets of incandescent star dust millions of miles behind it: a thing of breathtaking beauty. And to think I almost missed it.

A theme in today’s gospel is our need to stay awake spiritually, to be ready to encounter God when he comes to us. “Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master’s return . . . ready to open immediately when he comes. . . And should He come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants.” My early morning encounter with Comet West is a symbol to me of what that scripture passage is supposed to feel like, of all the beauty God offers us, and all I have missed during my life due to my spiritual sleep.

Today I want to preach about one way the Holy Spirit enters our lives. The Holy Spirit can seem strange. We believe in the Spirit, but we aren't sure how, or if, He touches our lives concretely. So, I want to suggest how the Holy Spirit comes to us as the Master in the quiet, who inspires, and invites us to holiness.

What are such inspirations of the Holy Spirit like? I want to give a concrete example by quoting St. Faustina, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Polish nun and mystic. One day she wrote in her diary, "This evening I was going to bed. But as I went into my cell suddenly I felt inwardly that I had to go to Sister X (a sick nun) . . . I went straight to her cell and Sister X said, 'Oh, how good it is . . . that God sent you. . . Sister, please bring me a little tea with lemon, because I'm so thirsty and . . . I'm suffering so much.' I settled her more comfortably and quenched her thirst with a little tea. When I went back into my cell, my soul was penetrated with a great love for God, and I understood that we should pay great attention to inner inspirations and follow them faithfully. And faithfulness to one grace attracts others."

Simple, huh? One of the main ways the Holy Spirit works in our lives is through prompts and nudges to little, ordinary acts of charity like Faustina's helping of her sick sister. There is nothing extraordinary in such inspirations. We receive them all the time. An idea pops into our head to help this person, or call that person, or speak a kind word to a co-worker who is sad, etc. These thoughts come to our minds quickly and delicately. But that's the Holy Spirit at work! Think of my invitation to get up and see the comet! God calls us from our sleep. But we usually miss those invitations, or rejection them out of laziness, busyness, embarrassment – spiritual sleepiness, we roll over and go back to sleep, so to speak. If we only knew that in doing so, we're rejecting the Holy Spirit's invitation to our own deep holiness!

And the good news is that these inspirations snowball if we let them! As St. Faustina said, "faithfulness to one grace attracts others!" It builds momentum. It is a law of the Holy Spirit: each act of fidelity to an inspiration is rewarded by more graces and more frequent and stronger inspirations. As long as we keep saying "Yes" the soul is gradually, but with increasing power, drawn into greater faithfulness and sensitivity to

God, a clearer understanding of His will, and an even greater ability to say that “Yes!” the next time.

“[B]e like servants who await their master’s return . . . ready to open immediately when he comes.” God speaks to our hearts every single day. We need to be attentive to those inspirations of the Holy Spirit if we are to allow Christ to fill our lives. That is our goal: transformation in, and into, Christ.

And He shows us the way by these breadcrumbs of charity, little invitations on the path of our daily lives – which, if we are attentive – awake – and answer the summons, will lead us, one step at a time, to Him. And His grace will make us more beautiful than any comet. We’re being summoned to that encounter. Let us resolve, then, to be persons of prayer – to stay awake and allow the Holy Spirit to change our lives by saying, “Yes!” to all His whispers to charity in our souls.