How many of us remember the day when we were born? Chances are none of us do. Some however may have the privilege of seeing old photographs or even videos while they were newborns…or nowadays some even capture the moment of a child’s birth streaming it live on FB or YouTube. I had a friend who did that a few weeks ago, capturing the moment of his daughter’s birth and sharing it with the rest of the world. But I think that’s a little too extreme. Nevertheless, I think we can all agree that life is a cherished gift from God and that every life is indeed precious and priceless in God’s sights.

As the LORD revealed to the prophet Jeremiah that even *"before we were formed in our mother’s womb, God knew us already. Before we were born, God consecrated us and appointed us as prophets to the nations."[[1]](#footnote-1)* **Only by God’s grace we are able to fulfill what God has intended for us.** Our outward physical appearance might have changed over the years, but deep inside we are still the same person. **Even though physically we can never be re-born again but spiritually we can.**

In the passage that we just read from John, we encountered a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was a member of the elite Jewish religious council – the Sanhedrin. Even though Nicodemus was a well-versed religious scholar and highly respected among his community, he was not without flaws. Deep inside, Nicodemus felt this sense of spiritual inadequacy about his own faith journey. There was something missing. There is a yearning searching for more in deepening his relationship with Jesus.

Nicodemus was kind of caught in the middle. Many of his fellow Pharisees challenged Jesus’s religious authority. They would look for every opportunity to accuse Jesus of blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah, and turn him over to the Romans. But Nicodemus was not to be deterred. He saw something in Jesus that others didn’t. He was willing to give Jesus the benefit of a doubt to hear what He had to say. Just what if…what if Jesus was indeed who he claimed he was? Nicodemus had more questions than answers while searching for his spiritual belonging, while all along he was keeping his personal faith private and incognito, separating his faith from his everyday life, like some believers do today. But Nicodemus’s faith was about to take a major transformation – a complete turnaround.

Interestingly Nicodemus was mentioned two other times in the Gospel of John. Besides the encounter that we read today, we also saw Nicodemus right after Jesus had been arrested and was put on trial by the religious authority. It was Nicodemus who mustered up his courage to stand up and petition on behalf of Jesus that he should be granted a fair trial and a fair hearing under the Jewish law.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Well, unfortunately we all know how that turned out. Nicodemus was probably warned and he was silenced by his fellow Pharisees, nevertheless he persisted. He might be out-numbered and out-voiced by others but he stood by what he believed in. He asserted his belief that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, sent from God for the salvation of humankind. Nicodemus differentiated himself from the rest risking all kinds of public ridicule and humiliation. **This was the turning point, a Kairos moment, of Nicodemus’s faith around.** He left his personal conviction and faith all out there in the public for others to see. One could only imagine how many people might also be inspired for his courage to speak out on behalf of Jesus.

Come to think of it, how many of us would have the courage to do the same thing as Nicodemus did…standing up for Jesus. How many of us would rather be silent and keep our faith incognito when we see Jesus being mocked, his name being ridiculed, or when we see injustice happening to our neighbors all around us. Even Jesus’s closest disciples (the inner circles of Peter, James and John) retreated and denied their relationship with Jesus fearing their own personal welfare.

Later on, we saw Nicodemus the third time, after Jesus had been crucified. This time, along with Joseph of Arimathea who was another one of Jesus’s “secret” disciples, Nicodemus brought the expensive myrrh to anoint Jesus’s body and provided for a tomb for Jesus’s burial.[[3]](#footnote-3) Obviously as we all know, Jesus didn’t really stick around too long in his burial. But at the very least that’s what they could offer to pay their ultimate respect and recognition of Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Through these series of events, we could piece together a snapshot of Nicodemus’s journey of faith – he was being transformed by the Spirit from being a coward to an advocate for Jesus. He was not afraid to take a stand or to take risks. He was a dreamer!!! He knew his life was not perfect and his faith was still in its infancy phase. And that’s why Jesus used the analogy that he must be born again….but this time being born in the Spirit, and from above.

Nicodemus put everything on the line, including his personal reputation, his social status, accomplishment, and his religious conviction and integrity. Some commentator, however, suggested that one of Nicodemus’s weaknesses was that up until now he had kept his faith private even though he had the power and influence to do more as a public figure. How many of us are willing to take on that challenge ourselves, when the Spirit calls upon us to do likewise?

In his quest for purpose and meaning in life, Nicodemus was told by Jesus that **“*no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and of the Spirit. You must be born from above”.***In other translation, it was translated as **“You must be born again”, “from the beginning”, or “of the Spirit”**. Can this even be possible, one might ask? How can anyone be “born” again out of his or her mother’s womb?

Obviously, Jesus didn’t mean this quite literally but metaphorically – by some form of a spiritual awakening that changes one’s life. **Start from scratch again with a “clean slate” so to speak.** Or as one commentator suggested, “***To be born from above by water and the Spirit, to believe in Jesus, is to leave the world of darkness [behind] and to come into the light.*[[4]](#footnote-4)**

Perhaps like Nicodemus, in order for us to be “born again from above”, we must also do a little soul searching of our own, by hitting the “reset” button. Instead of recounting what got us here, we ought to focus on where do we go from here and what God may have installed for us next. Nevermind what credentials or personal accomplishments that we may have, what matters is the legacy and the impact of our lives upon others. How are we passing on that baton to others for the next generations to come?

**The Season of Lent, which we are in right now, invites us to do just that….to pause and to reflect what God has been doing and what we are being called to do.** Like Nicodemus, at times we may find ourselves yearning for more from God. We want to dig a little deeper but we keep denying ourselves. We are too afraid to come out to speak up. We might be lost spiritually in the wilderness waiting for God to take us back, but we are too proud and too stubborn to ask for direction. We put up imaginary walls and fences all around us, to make ourselves feel safe and comfort while by doing so, we are limiting the potential of what the Spirit might have in store for us.

Despite his personal challenges and his seeming private faith, Nicodemus dismantled those fences and came knocking on Jesus’s door and thirsting for the living water. **Out of his world of darkness, Nicodemus came to seek the light of Christ that will illuminate his path towards righteousness.** Jesus offered Nicodemus more than what he came looking for. Jesus was *the light that has come into the world, but the people loved darkness rather than light.[[5]](#footnote-5)*

In the same way, **by inviting the Spirit into our lives, we allow the Spirit to speak to us and lead us into places where we’ve never gone before. This is our wilderness experience that God has placed us in, where we might find ourselves vulnerable, uncomfortable and lonely at times.** The Holy Spirit has promised to lead us, transform us and equip us with boldness and courage the same way as the Spirit did to Nicodemus.

Last week, if you recall, we read about Abraham and Sarah, who enjoyed the plentiful earthly blessings from God. They were well established and blessed in life, yet God challenged them, even at their old age, to be quite literally “born again”. Abram and Sarai had been barren and had never experienced the joy of parenthood, the gift of procreation. They burst into laughter when God told them that they would bear a child in their “young” age of 90. God established a covenant and made a pledge to them that “*I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”*

Come to think of it, there a Nicodemus, an Abraham or a Sarah within each of us as well. We all have our personal doubts when we fail to trust God in responding to our purpose and our calling in our own life and in ministry. There will be times when we are being called upon like Nicodemus to take a stand about our faith and take a step out of our comfort zone. We found ourselves standing at the crossroad with our spiritual tank running low or near empty and we need a spiritual fill-up. We may feel ashamed to seek Christ face-to-face during the day, but instead we would rather come at night seeking Jesus in private when others are not watching. Nevertheless, Christ still embraced us as he did with Nicodemus, even with a faith as small as a mustard seed or as that of an immature and nurturing infant. God is making time and space available for us, but why can’t we do the same…by coming and knocking at his door.

Just as Jesus invited Nicodemus **to come out of the darkness and journey with Him into the light,[[6]](#footnote-6)** **we too have** **been invited to** **be “born again of the Spirit” into maturity with Christ.** When we are “born again” we begin to see things from a whole new perspective… God’s perspective and not ours. We see how we may play a vital role in fulfilling God’s purpose for humanity here on earth, just as God did by sending His only begotten Son to us.

***For God so LOVED the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life***. ***Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.[[7]](#footnote-7)***

**Throughout this season of Lent, Christ has invited all of us to step OUT of the darkness of this world and INTO the light of Christ**, the same way Nicodemus did when he came knocking and seeking for answers to his questions. This was part of our own faith exploration. Trust in God and abide in God’s love. As Jesus said, **“*Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.”***

**May we be** **“born again of the Spirit and from above” by accepting the Spirit’s invitation that molds us and shapes us into the persons whom God wants us to be.** Thanks be to God.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Jeremiah 1:5* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *John 7:50-52* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *John 19:39-40* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. p.72 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *John 3:19* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *John 3:19* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *John 3:16-17* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)