

***“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,
if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.” (Rom 8:9)***

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

There’s a lot of ways to get the Spirit wrong.
You’ve probably heard it a million times: *I’m spiritual; not religious.*
What does that even mean?
And what about: *I’m with you in spirit?*
What do we mean when we talk about the spirit?

And then there’s that verse from Romans,
*“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,
if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.” (Rom 8:9)*

Well how do you know?
Does the Spirit of God dwell in you?
I’d like to think so, and I’m sure you would too.
But can you know something of the Spirit?
Can you lock Him up and keep Him still and say for sure one way or the other?

I think we hear a lot about the Spirit in our world today precisely because the Spirit is abstract.
When people say they’re *spiritual; not religious*, what they mean is that
they want to believe whatever they believe
and not be pinned down to a set doctrine or practice.

They don’t want borders or boundaries or limits or law.
They want freedom—but not a freedom to serve others—a freedom to serve themselves.
And so do we.

It’s not just those out there, but us in here.
We hate being wrong; but we hate it even more when someone tells us we’re wrong.
We know we’re sinful, but we’d rather keep it abstract than actually name the sins out loud.
We know that death comes to all, but we really don’t think it’ll come to us—at least not yet.

We’re very comfortable in our spirituality, floating around in a sort of ideal world.
And then death hits—not us, yet, but someone close.
And when it hits, it hits like a load you’ve never felt before.
You stand in the cemetery and you don’t know what to say or think or do.
So you cry, or you shut it all in—you panic—even if it’s entirely internal.

Why?
Why don’t you know what to say or do?
Where’s your spirituality in the cemetery?
Where’s your clichés about being in the spirit?

Well, they're buried under 6 ft. of reality.

Cemeteries have a way of facing us up to reality—
at least, a reality that can be touched and felt and studied and measured.

It's hard to confess the Spirit in a cemetery because our abstract way of thinking and believing is
faced up to a reality we're not used to.

And that scares us.

When death hits, we doubt ourselves.

We recognize our own mortality.

It hits that we too will one day be like the valley of dry bones, or Lazarus wrapped in a tomb.

At some point we'll be another number on death's ticker,
and our tombstone another trophy in death's cabinet.

This sort of crisis is good.

In fact, it's a test.

Luther would even go so far as to call it God's game, or trick.

For God, death is a giant joke.

And for whatever reason, He finds it unbearably funny.

And God willing, we'll find the strength to laugh at it too!

Today's texts are meant to be funny, in a way.

You've got a valley full of dry bones—not just bones recently placed in the ground,
but bones long dead,

picked clean by the birds,

bleached by the sun,

and brittle from years of weathering.

“Son of Man, can these bones live?” (Ezek 37:3)

What a dumb question!

Right?

Martha thinks so.

Jesus doesn't ask Martha, but tells her plainly, ***“Your brother will rise again.”*** (Jn 11:23)

And Martha shows her faith in the resurrection, but feels the need to correct Jesus—

“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” (11:24)

What's implied here, as with the dry bones, is that sure,
the bones can live and Lazarus will rise, *but not now*.

That'd be a joke.

Death is real, but the resurrection is an abstraction—something way off in the future, hopefully.

But that's not how it is for God.

Death's the abstraction, the resurrection is the reality.

That's why he tells Ezekiel to prophecy to the bones.
 From what our eyes can see and our reason comprehends, it's pure foolishness.
 And yet God delights in making wise the simple,
 and turning fools out of those who think they know better.

It's a game to Him.
 Death has no power.
 It has no victory—no trophies, no wins, no hope, no home.
 As St. Paul says,
*"Death is swallowed up in victory."
 O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"* (1 Cor 15:54-55)

It's been defeated in Christ!
*Christ is risen from the dead,
 Trampling down death by death,
 And upon those in the tombs
 Bestowing life!*

That's why death is a joke.
 That's why the bones can live.
 That's why Lazarus, four days buried in the tomb comes waddling out, still in his grave clothes.
 Because Jesus lives.

As He says to Martha,
*"I AM the resurrection and the life.
 Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live,
 and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die."* (Jn 11:25-26)

Do you believe this?
 Lazarus did.
 He heard the voice of His master and obediently followed—and death couldn't stop him.
 The dry bones, that army of the house of Israel, also believed.
 They heard the voice of their Shepherd, the prophet, and did just as He prophesied.

And all of this is very spiritual.
 Not in the way of the world, that claims to be spiritual, but not religious—
 but the sort of Spiritual that is always bound the word of Christ.

Notice how Ezekiel is commanded to prophecy,
*"Prophecy to the breath [which means Spirit];
 prophesy son of man, and say to the breath,
 'Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath,
 and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'"* (Ezek 37:9)

And St. Paul says in our Epistle today,

“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin,

the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,

*He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies
through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Rom 8:9-11)*

The Spirit does everything, but not abstractly.

He leaves nothing in doubt, no uncertainty.

Does the Spirit dwell within you?

Rather than checking your feelings or your emotions or anything like that,
ask yourself if you’ve received the Word of God.

Has the word of God attached itself to water and poured over your head?

Has the word joined itself to bread and wine and fed your hungry soul?

Has the word been preached into your ears, calming your fears and delivering Christ?

If the Word dwells in you—again, not abstractly, but in these measureable ways—

than you can be sure that what happened to the dry bones will happen to you;

and what went for Lazarus goes for you;

because both of those are simply images and pictures of what Jesus Himself said and did.

He died and He rose; and He did it all for you.

Death is a game, a joke—even a big lie.

The resurrection and life, on the other hand—now those are real.

That’s our religion—and it’s very spiritual.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit