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DANIEL 10:1-12 SHOCK AND AWE

¹ *In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.*

² *At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. ³ I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.*

⁴ *On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, ⁵ I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. ⁶ His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.*

⁷ *I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. ⁸ So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. ⁹ Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.*

¹⁰ *A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. ¹¹ He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.*

¹² *Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.*

How seriously do we take an encounter with the Word of God? This was not a vision of the angel Gabriel for it evoked from the Prophet not the usual response of worship but one of holy dread. This experience on the banks of the Tigris and that on the Road to Damascus are quite similar. It was an encounter with the Word of God, the Light of Truth which blazingly illuminated the sinful nature of the Prophet. Before the awesome power of the Truth that which is not holy and perfectly true is shattered like a mud hut in an earthquake. One has no strength to stand in the presence of the Almighty.

There is a cost to being in the presence of God. Yes, he is the Shepherd and we are lambs. Yet we must remember that a lamb is innocent and humble; totally submissive to the shepherd. That description does not fit our resume. In order to truly experience the love of the shepherd the lamb must not run away and set itself up as an autonomous kingdom unto itself, arrogantly declaring itself sovereign and endeavoring to remake the shepherd according to its own terms. No, to submit to the Shepherd involves the pain of stripping away all those things and absolutely submitting to God.

Daniel knows this through his discipline of prayer, fasting and mourning over the sins of Israel. Like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Daniel cannot finish the task of completely humbling himself before the Lord. But with his heart set on the Lord, and the first steps taken toward submission, the Lord appears and finishes the task. Once his human strength is squeezed out, then God infuses the Prophet with his divine strength.

God's Word is awesome. It shatters the façade of pride and arrogance. It unmakes the mud huts of our understanding and achievements. If we are not radically affected by our encounter with the Word in the Scriptures and the Sacrament, perhaps the problem is in the lack of preparation of our hard heart rather than in the absence of the Divine power.

O Lord, replace my pitiful and misguided strength with that strength which only comes from you. Amen.