**Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7**

Thus says the LORD:
Here is my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen one with whom I am pleased,
upon whom I have put my spirit;
he shall bring forth justice to the nations,
not crying out, not shouting,
not making his voice heard in the street.
A bruised reed he shall not break,
and a smoldering wick he shall not quench,
until he establishes justice on the earth;
the coastlands will wait for his teaching.

I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice,
I have grasped you by the hand;
I formed you, and set you
as a covenant of the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes of the blind,
to bring out prisoners from confinement,
and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

**Psalm 29:1-4, 10-11**

Honor the Lord, you heavenly beings;
    honor the Lord for his glory and strength.
Honor the Lord for the glory of his name.
    Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.

The voice of the Lord echoes above the sea.
    The God of glory thunders.
    The Lord thunders over the mighty sea.
The voice of the Lord is powerful;
    the voice of the Lord is majestic.

The Lord rules over the floodwaters.

    The Lord reigns as king forever.
The Lord gives his people strength.
    The Lord blesses them with peace.

**Acts 10:34-38**

Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism. And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

[**Luke 3:15-16, 21-22**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/luke/3%3A15)

The people were filled with expectation,
and all were asking in their hearts
whether John might be the Christ.
John answered them all, saying,
“I am baptizing you with water,
but one mightier than I is coming.
I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

After all the people had been baptized
and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him
in bodily form like a dove.
And a voice came from heaven,
“You are my beloved Son;
with you I am well pleased.”

*I pray that out of his glorious richeshe may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Ephesians 3:16-19

Like an uninflated balloon sticking to itself, so are we, at times, in our relationship to God’s life-filling agenda for us.  Rubber clings to rubber just as the self clings to self.  This very attachment is what, at first, prevents the air from further entering the balloon. Once it has “let go of itself” however, the balloon can now receive the air more deeply within itself.  In a similar way, the Spirit frees us from our attachment to ourselves in order that Christ might initially dwell in our hearts through faith.

But this is only the first stage of intake that is possible for a balloon.  Initially, it receives the air only to the capacity that is natural to its present form.  But in order for it to continue to grow it will require an even more radical overcoming of self.

We’ve all experienced something of the resistance of a stubborn balloon that seems to refuse more air.  No matter how hard we blow, it resists expanding beyond its original size.  The balloon perhaps quite easily receives the air to its first capacity, but it seemingly has to overcome some internal resistance before it is able to stretch to its next capacity.

Eventually, as we persist in maintaining pressure, the balloon releases its grip on its present form and expands to accept the increasing air coming into its walls.  It has lost its “will” to resist and now has little choice but to go along with the pressure that is building up within.  It welcomes the increasing inflow of air which purposes to expand the balloon to its fullest capacity.

Similar is the work of the Holy Spirit in us.  As the first signs of a spiritual life well up within us they are often resisted by our attachment to ourselves.  The self clings to the self and needs to be freed from this first attachment before the Holy Spirit can begin to fill us more.  But it is this second stage of growth that will require of us a much more radical overcoming of ourselves.

We all enjoy being filled by the Spirit, but we also resist being stretched.  Like a balloon holding its ground against the incoming air, we stubbornly refuse to change shape.  But as the persistent pressure of God’s Spirit mounts within us, our resistance eventually breaks down.  Our walls thin out and stretch in ways that we never believed possible.  God is expanding us to the fuller measure of who we are in Christ.

If this metaphor resonates in any way, perhaps it might help us in the coming year to more intentionally welcome and participate with the infilling of God—to expand our souls so that we can grasp more fully “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.”  May our hearts remain open.  And may we not resist the inevitable stretching that will create in us a greater capacity to “be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

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