

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

Pentecost Sunday
May 27, 2007
Fr. Bill McGinty

“The Spirit of Children”

“All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God”

For several weeks now, Jesus has been preparing his disciples for his departure and promising to send them the Holy Spirit. Paul, writing to the Christians in Rome, tells them that “all who allow themselves to be led by God’s Spirit become children of God.” It fits so well with the teaching of Jesus to his disciples:

“Unless you become like little children you shall not enter the Kingdom of my Father.”

There is something to examine here, about the nature of our relationship with God. It cannot be like the relationship Israel had with God in the Old Testament. It cannot be a relationship based on fear. Throughout his teaching Jesus paints another picture of God, as the loving, caring and forgiving Father. Over and over he repeats to his disciples that salvation is not to be found in jumping through hoops, obeying the letter of the law, or doing good works that others might see your goodness. Salvation is about, being God-like. Just as a child learns from its parent, so we learn from the loving God, who treats us like this child.

What parent would judge their child harshly or seek to punish immaturity, mistakes or foolishness? Jesus asks the question in many forms.

Pentecost and what happens to the Apostles and disciples teaches us a clear prescriptive lesson:

“You may be failures, as disciples and the very worst students to such a great master and teacher; you may be torn by strife and sinners in so any ways, but because you are chosen, and have attached yourself to the Christ, the Spirit will come and he will lead you. He will lead you to the Father and you will possess all the rights and privileges of sons and daughters of the Most High God.”

“Once,” says Paul, “you were slaves to sin, but now you have been set free because you have received the spirit of adoption.”

Do you think that it is true that most Christians go through life, unaware of the power and gifts that are available to them, simply by calling upon the Holy Spirit?”

The Apostles receive these gifts and are transformed at Pentecost. It is as if the: “penny has finally dropped and they wake up to a realization that they have been walking, talking

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and learning from the Messiah, the Son of God.” It is as if, the scales fall from their eyes and they rush out to tell the world the meaning of Jesus, his life, death and teaching.

The Disciples have an excuse; they are poor, uneducated fishermen from Galilee. You and I have no excuse. We have known about Jesus and his teaching for a long time. At our fingertips are the writings of great scholars, saints and men and women who have knowledge of the divine. We have been to college and followed the liturgy of Jesus’ life year after year. If we have never experienced the Holy Spirit in our life, we know it is only because he could not get in passed our work schedule, cell phone, materialism and lust for things temporal that will not last.

It is the great paradox of our Christian faith and one we need to address. We know with some certainty that we are destined to die and pass to a spiritual existence. We know that only the things of the Spirit can help us in that life; growing our Spirit, abiding in love, seeking peace, finding forgiveness. Yet, despite that, we all too often ignore the Holy Spirit and the quest for wholeness and holiness and continue to accumulate junk that piles up to hinder our true search for our real self, on our journey to God.

Our first reading today is from the Acts of the Apostles where the author, Luke, tells the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and its effect on the population of Jerusalem. Luke puts into the mouth of Peter the prophesy of Joel from the Old Testament.

It is one of the most beautiful passages in the entire Bible and it has a universal message of hope and salvation: “In the last days it will be,” God declares, “that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters will prophesy and your young men will see visions and your old men shall dream dreams...and everyone who calls upon the Lords name will be saved.” Acts 2-??

How can we, who have been baptized and educated in this faith, fail to participate in its most important part; living, receiving and embracing the Holy Spirit in our life is the only way, we poor souls can ever hope to succeed in building God’s Kingdom, realizing Christ’s vision and making his name and Gospel known in a world that cares little for the Spirit he taught? Pentecost arrives each year to remind us: “You do not have to walk alone, walk in the spirit and you will be able to realize those dreams and achieve those visions.”

Last Friday night I had a very strange dream. It was so strange that I remembered it in the morning. So much so, that part of it came back to me throughout Saturday.

I seemed to have been in this dream for quite a while before I discovered that I was dead. It was more of a gradual realization rather than anything else. It made sense of some of the other things that I had seen in my dream.

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In the dream I had been wandering around a camp type area. It reminded me of parts of Sussex County. Many of you were there. You seemed to be very happy and you were seeking out your favorite saint or angel and were in deep conversation with them. For some reason this made me deeply apprehensive. I was re-assured by the person who was always at my side in the dream; it was my son, Sam. He was still twelve years old but he seemed to be my guide. He did something which you might have experienced from your own kids; he switched roles and was re-assuring and teaching me. It's something he has done a couple of times in real life, teaching me to shoot hoops, copy and paste on the computer, or when he doesn't want me to get mad.

Anyway, I am pacing around in the dream waiting for my turn to talk to some heavenly figure. I ask Sam what it's all about and he tells me that each person is going over their life with the saint of their choice. They all seem very happy. Sam says they are being told that they have been saved and have merited heaven and eternal life.

If this was meant to reassure me, it doesn't and I keep replaying the worse events of my earthly life and trying to balance them against all the good things. The math doesn't look so good, and I begin to fear the worst.

Sam leads me to the only spirit or angel left, and who would it be but Michael the Archangel. At this stage I am talking like an idiot muttering how sorry I am that I had no devotion to him in my life and did not even pray to him. Now I am experiencing real fear, although Michael does not look like the angel in armor in our stain glass window, instead he looks like the Chelsea soccer player Frank Lampard.

He is very nice and fair and he tells me that he cannot judge me. That is only something that God can do. "Besides," he tells me, "You are a child of God, the God who loves you."

All day I thought about my dream. I kept remembering what a parishioner said to me some weeks before Easter: "We are not saved through our own merits, we are saved by the cross and death of our savior Jesus Christ."

It seemed to make sense to me for the rest of the day that Christ sends us his spirit, the spirit of Pentecost, to bring us home, home to our Father and his.

Whether that time is long or short, we all know that in our lives we still have things to accomplish. Yet all our efforts, all our work is as nothing unless it is touched by the Holy Spirit.

In the Acts of the Apostles after Pentecost the High Council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, meets to discuss how to crush the embryonic group who has begun to teach about Jesus.

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Among them arise an old scholar and teacher of the law called Gamariel who says: "Brothers, we do not have to do anything against these men. If their teaching is false it will die a natural death, but if it is from the Holy Spirit, neither you nor I nor any power on earth, will stand against it."

We Christians believe that all we are about as a church and as a people is touched by that same Holy Spirit. One of our parishioners, Debbie Conroy is fond of saying: "The Holy Spirit is flying through this church." I was convinced of it the first Sunday I was here in May 2003. I was convinced of it the day the women came and told me: "We feel called, we have prayed, we need to form a Chapter of the Daughters of the King."

I have been convinced that the Spirit of truth has spoken in many of your hearts and continues to call us to a higher and deeper response to the Gospel. Jesus' Gospel words today apply to us both as a group and as individuals: "I have said these things to you while I am still with you, but the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you my peace I give to you; I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Reading this, it strikes me that we have much to learn from our children. Perhaps it is because the Spirit of God already flows freely through them. Let us pray in this Eucharist, that in all that we do, we too may be children of God and open to his Spirit.

Amen+

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