

May 17, 2020
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts of the Apostles 8:5-8, 14-17
Psalm 66:1-7, 16, 20
1 Peter 3:15-18
John 14:14:15-21

The Scripture readings for this Sunday focus our attention to the dynamics of the very early church, and the necessary transition from the physically present Jesus to that of the coming indwelling Holy Spirit.

A careful reading of the Scripture reveals that as Jesus was preparing to leave this earth and return to His Father in Heaven He did not want His disciples to remain without consolation. In addition we are also assured that a loving Father will not leave His children as orphans without direction and support; subsequently with Jesus' soon departure God's eternal plan was to send the Third Person of the Blessed Holy Trinity to indwell and empower those who would choose to follow the Lord.

Hence St. Luke records Jesus as promising, "But you shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

One of the blessings I find in reading the Bible is that the stories and illustrations make sense, they really do. The Bible makes sense because it accurately relates to normal life, and it addresses many of the day-to-day topics that are extremely important to all of us.

Take this morning's gospel reading for example, and try to think about it from the perspective of a parent or a spouse, or even a good friend. If you knew that you were going to die soon, and you

were going to leave your spouse or your children to fend for themselves, especially if they up to this time had leaned very heavily on you for direction and support, wouldn't you if at all possible, wouldn't you want to leave them with some sort of additional resources to help provide for them in your absence?

Think about it, isn't that why we are encouraged to provide some form of life insurance for our family - or at least I think if at all possible we should. Here I know some people will say, well no you really don't need to purchase life insurance because Jesus gives us life assurance. All you have to do is just trust the Lord to work everything out.

If you explore the meaning of the word insurance you will find that it means "the act of insuring one's person against loss or harm arising in specified contingencies, such as fire, accident, death, disablement, or the like, in consideration of a payment proportionate to the risk involved.

My point is that we live in a sinful world, one, which will eventually bring death to everyone and everything it encompasses. Subsequently, I think Jesus set a very good example for us in providing life assurance insurance for His disciples. The risk involved in being one of Jesus' disciples is very high. We might even suggest that the Holy Spirit is our gifted provision proportionate to the risk involved.

Jesus knew that His disciples and the emerging infant Church would need a lot of emotional and spiritual assistance in His absence. He said in this world you will have tribulation, and for my namesake some of you will even suffer and die. Hence He said,

If you love me you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept. Because it neither sees nor knows him. But you know him because he remains with you, and *will be in you*.

So what we see in this passage is that Jesus is here making a very definitive statement, if you love me keep my commandments. In other words, one of the best ways to help or respect others is by keeping the Commandments. Earlier Jesus had told them to love each other, but now He was exhorting them, "If you love me, then keep my commandments and obey what I command. And I will ask the Father and He will give you the *Paraclete* or Comforter.

Now I think it is important to note here that Jesus was speaking in general terms concerning the Church, He was not speaking to the individual. Jesus was not connecting the keeping of His Commandments with the reception of the Holy Spirit. In other words, receiving the Holy Spirit is not based on our performance or lack thereof.

Our life assurance insurance comes with the benefits package of being baptized into Jesus Christ. The sending of the Holy Spirit comes as a gift, a free gift of pure love and not whether or not we obey all of His commands.

According to Acts 2:38 the indwelling Holy Spirit is a gift given at one's baptism into Christ. To teach that the Holy Spirit is at the beck and call of mankind's resultant works is to once again to make man the subject and God the object of our faith, something that the early church took great pains and precautions to avoid.

So then some may ask, if the Holy Spirit is a gift from God given at baptism then how is it that some people seem to exhibit more fruit and/or more gifts of the Spirit than do others. Here I think the issue is more a matter of one's yielding to the inner workings of the Spirit than the initial reception.

In other words those who desire to *invest* in more time with God in prayer, meditation and in receiving the Sacraments, they are the ones who tend to have a deeper relationship with God thus they manifest more of His divine attributes or character.

In other words God's gifts are irrevocable, nevertheless when not exercised they remain, you might say dormant. Like seed left in the bag unless it is sown and cared for it remains just that - seed in a sack. The seed is the gift but we have to put it to use. A rather poor example I know, but I think you know what I am trying to say.

So where do we start. Lets say we are convinced, we have repented, and we have been baptized and we really do want to receive Gods blessings and provision, what do we do next?

There is an old saying in AA that goes like this, "just suit up and show up." Well, what exactly does the term "just suit up and show up" mean? I think in essence what it means is - keep it simple - get back to the basics, and just be present and available. In other words, and I'm here speaking in general terms, people want the blessings from God - and the fact is - He is present to us, but the real question remains, "are we present to Him"?

Catholics get criticized because we don't talk a lot about instructing people to "accept Jesus and invite Him into our hearts." So do you know why orthodox Christianity doesn't talk about accepting Jesus into one's heart? Simply stated, the phraseology is not in the Bible.

So then, does that give us an excuse not to evangelize or share our faith in Christ? No not all, on the contrary in the second reading today, St. Peter admonishes us,

Beloved: sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscious clear, so that when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil (1Peter 3:15-17).

So what we see here is that we do have a responsibility to share our faith with others. But in order to effectively share our faith I think we need to have our priorities in order.

Pope Benedict once wrote, "Faith does not mean just accepting a certain number of abstract truths about the mysteries of God, of man, of life and death, of future realities. Faith consists in an intimate relationship with Christ, a relationship based on love of him who loved us first, even to the total offering of himself."

The Amplified Bible rendering of Galatians 3:27 states,

For all of you who were baptized into Christ [into a spiritual union with the Christ, the Anointed] have clothed yourselves with Christ [that is, you have taken on His characteristics and values].

The Holy Spirit and the manifestations of the Spirit are not meant for show. The Holy Spirit is called the *Paraclete*, our Advocate, Comforter, or One called along side. As the third person of the

Blessed Trinity He is God within us, ever present to comfort, encourage, guide and instruct.

So what are we to do in following the Lord? The answer is follow the leading of the Holy Spirit - bring comfort, encouragement, guidance, and instruction to all those whom we meet. We only have one job as Christians and that job is to be Christ to a lost and dying world.

Indeed, we have much to be thankful for. All blessings are possible because Jesus loves us, and therefore He said, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." His promises to send the Holy Spirit will become even more real as we whole-heartedly dedicate our hearts and minds to Him.

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