

Pentecost - (Year A) – June 4, 2017

ACTS 2:1-11; PS 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34; 1 COR 12:3B-7, 12-13; JN 20:19-23

I have a priest friend in another diocese who is very much like the “**Absent Minded Professor**”. He’s actually very intelligent—very “book smart”—but he does things from time to time that really make you scratch your head.

One such thing is **forgetting to cash or deposit his paycheck**. His paycheck will end up under a pile of **papers**...or a pile of **clothes**...or a pile of **something**...and he’ll completely forget about it. **For a month!**

Now, granted, I don’t know my friend’s finances in detail, but he’s **not** wealthy; and he certainly has **bills** to pay; he needs to buy **food**; and I’m sure he gives some money away to **charity**. Which is why I can’t get my mind around something so central... something so necessary...being such an afterthought.

Now some of you may—like me—be thinking, “**How could anyone be so oblivious to something so obvious, something so central to life?**” After all, a paycheck is a worthless piece of paper until it’s *activated*—endorsed with a signature and either **cash**ed or **depos**ited into an account so the money can actually be *used*.

Believe it or not, the way this priest handles his paycheck provides us a great opportunity to reflect on **Pentecost**. How so? Well, let’s imagine that this priest is not just neglecting his **rather small priest paycheck** but rather, a check for **\$500 Million**. If we knew he had something *that* valuable sitting **untouched**, and *un-activated* under his pile of dirty socks, we’d think him **irresponsible** and maybe even *insane*—considering all the good that could be done with that kind of money...in the hands of a good priest.

In this light, we begin to see what it means for a person to have the Holy Spirit dwelling in his or her soul, but failing to “**activate**” the Holy Spirit’s **gifts** and failing to bear the Holy Spirit’s **fruits**.

The Holy Spirit is much more than a mere “blessing” in the life of a Christian. The Holy Spirit is **God himself living in the Christian soul**, waiting to unleash his immense power and influence *in that person’s life* for the building up of the Body of Christ—the Church—and drawing others into relationship with the Lord.

So, to delve into our reflection on **Pentecost**, let's turn the tables for a moment and focus **not** on some absent-minded priest who don't cash his paycheck.

No...let's turn the tables on **ourselves**...and ask *ourselves*:

- Have I treated the Holy Spirit the way this priest treats his paycheck?
- Have I let the very power of God the Holy Spirit—who has lived in my soul since my Baptism and whose full potential was infused into my soul at my Confirmation—get buried under my *fears*...my *doubts*...my *indifference*...my *obsessions*...my *distractions*?
- Am I even aware that I received the *very same Holy Spirit* that converted the *rag-tag band of misfits* called the Apostles into an *evangelizing force* that transformed the world?

The Acts of the Apostles is a continuous account of the power of the Holy Spirit working miraculous effects in previously **uninfluential individuals**. And Christian history is replete with stories of otherwise unimpressive and un-extraordinary men, women, boys and girls, exercising the supernatural power and influence of God the Holy Spirit across the globe. We call these people **Saints**.

Now lest we think that *they* were remarkable from the start...and that **we** are not meant to inhabit the same **realms of holiness** and work similar **supernatural wonders**, let's consider what St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians:

...consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor 1:26-29)

Jesus himself affirmed this when he says to us the same thing he said to his Apostles:

It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain... (Jn 15:16)

And in **today's Gospel**, where Jesus said:

As the Father has sent me, so I send you. (Jn 20:21-22)

In the Acts of the Apostle's, Peter described **how** the Father sent Jesus:

...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power...he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (Acts 10:38)

So, let's get this straight. God sent Jesus to do extraordinary things—to free people from sin, to heal people and to bring them into relationship with the Father.

And Jesus sends **each disciple** to play a particular part in the same mission.

Each...disciple.

You...and me.

How do we **know** this?

Because of what St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians as we heard in our 2nd Reading:

To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. (1 Cor 12:7)

The manifestation referred to here by St. Paul is **supernatural**. Each one of us has received at least one such divine gift from the Holy Spirit. These are not mere **talents**, nor are they areas of merely **human skill** or **expertise**. They are gifts given us by the Holy Spirit—for building up the Church and witnessing to Christ. And they're called "**charisms**". When we use them, **we** are enabled—by God—to do remarkable things which, on our own, we could **not** do.

With this in mind, we really need to consider the way we **exercise...or squander...the** power inherent in our Catholic faith...given to us in the **Sacraments**. We must ask ourselves:

- Am I a Catholic in whom the power of the Holy Spirit is evident and active, putting me on **the same path as the greatest Saints** in Christian history?

- Am I even aware that I am expected to be *holy* and to become a *Saint*—that this is the very reason why I was created?
- Or is my Catholicism merely “**punch card Christianity**” where my **Sacramental checklist** has been filled in...and where my “**frequent pew sitter section**” gets stamped every Sunday...but my Christian life is devoid of any visible spiritual fruit?

So, then, if everyone receives the full power of the Holy Spirit, starting with **Baptism** and completed in **Confirmation**, then:

- Why is the Holy Spirit so **evidently at work** in *some* Christian lives, and **seemingly asleep or absent** in *other* Christian’s lives?
- Why do we have great **Saints** on the one hand, and **lukewarm pew sitters** on the other?
- Why does the Catholic faith seem to be a source of great *power* and *joy* in some Christian lives, and a boring routine in others... if, as St. Paul said in our 2nd Reading, “*we were all given to drink of one Spirit*” (cf. 1 Cor 12:13)?

St. Basil the Great shed lights on these questions when he says:

The power of the Spirit fills the whole universe, but he gives himself only to those who are *worthy*, acting in each according to the measure of his faith...To all creatures that share in him he gives a delight limited only by their own nature, not by his ability to give.

Breviary, Vol II, p. 975

So, clearly, any limitation of the Holy Spirit’s actions in a particular Christian’s life is a function of the **individual’s worthiness and faith**...and not in any shortcoming in the Holy Spirit himself.

So, what to do? Well, first of all, if we aren’t *praying*, we’re losing contact with **Jesus**, with the **Father** and with the **Holy Spirit**. We’re unplugging from our power source. So we must **pray**...daily. We need to pray the **Rosary**, hopefully, daily. We need to spend time praying in the **Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament**. And we have a **Perpetual Adoration Chapel** here at the Cathedral where every parishioner *could* have their own personal hour of **Adoration** with Jesus.

Imagine what it would do for **this parish** and for **each individual parishioner**, if every parishioner was **scheduled** for a specific hour of prayer with Jesus in that chapel. Imagine the power of the Holy Spirit that would be unleashed as a result that kind of dedication and commitment. But we don't have to just imagine it. We can do it...if we **choose** to do it.

If we are falling into sin...and we all do this...every day...then we need to go to **Confession**...regularly. My recommendation: **Once per month...minimum**. More frequently, if necessary!

Jesus said in another place in the Gospel of John:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you...” (Jn 6:53)

Clearly, we need to receive Jesus in **Holy Communion** if we expect the supernatural power and life of his Holy Spirit to be active in our lives. And if there is some grave sin in our life that prevents us from receiving Holy Communion worthily, then we need to let Jesus **fix** that by repenting and asking him for forgiveness, grace and strength.

The **Sacraments of Initiation**—Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion—provide each Christian with *everything* he or she needs to become a great Saint—a real Saint—*just like the ones we honor in our Catholic faith*.

Yes, I'm talking about **YOU**.

And the Sacramental grace given us in the **Eucharist** and **Confession** sustain us for this mission, even when we **fall**...even when we *fail*.

But there's one more piece to this whole “unleashing the Holy Spirit in my life” endeavor...and it's the simplest piece of all.

We simply have to ask Jesus to **reveal** to us what our particular **charism is** and to **unleash** its power in our lives.

In other words, we need to give Jesus permission to “**endorse the check of our soul**”...to unlock the Holy Spirit's power in us, so that we can truly become who we are in God's eyes....who he created us to be.