

052310 Pentecost Cycle C

I asked Father to leave the banner here in the sanctuary: Arise To New Life as a visual aid and reminder about our Pentecost goal. Christ arose to new life. And at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit showered gifts upon frightened and uncertain disciples and they arose to new life. One of the gifts they received was the gift of HOPE. That will be my theme today --- the virtue of hope. And in the time that I have, I want to try to relate hope in a red, white and blue homily: our hope in God – our hope in the Church and hope in our Country... This is a big undertaking for a moderate duration Sunday homily.

Sunday's Gospel says, "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said, 'Peace be with you.'" He breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit."

Now – keep this scene in your mind while I ask a couple questions. First – did the Apostles have faith before Jesus appeared to them in that room? Well – I believe they did have faith except that the crucifixion and death and much uncertainty – all of these conspired to shatter their faith. Did they have love? Oh, you bet they did – they loved Jesus so very much... What was it that was missing in their lives? I submit to you that what was missing was HOPE. And my premise for today's homily is that the Holy Spirit can set our faith on fire... can ignite the love of God that we have down deep inside of us – can lead us to Arise To New Life if we are open to receiving the Gifts of the Spirit. These gifts are made manifest by a birth... or a rebirth of Hope in our lives.

HOPE is so especially needed in all of us; we are not all that different than the disciples in the upper room – shrinking from the relativism, scorn and persecution of the world. Hope is described as the desire for something together with the expectation of obtaining it. “Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire an eternity in the kingdom of Heaven, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.” What those disciples in the upper room needed was a miraculous rebirth of hope. Hope was what they had lost.

For many of us – sadly for many of our young people – and perhaps for a lot of our older folks – hope has been lost. What many of us need is a miracle – a Pentecost sort of miracle to bring to life the hope that most of us have down deep inside. Now – it doesn’t have to be a miracle that makes us start speaking in tongues – it doesn’t have to be a miracle that leads us to go out and convert non-believers – it can be a personal, silent miracle which gives us a lively rebirth of the gifts given to us at our Baptism and our Confirmation.

Do you believe in miracles? Most Christians do – well, maybe in a cerebral way – up here in the head: “Sure, God can do anything – miracles are possible.” Dear friends – I truly believe we are surrounded by miracles. But they have been happening so long that we take all this as commonplace. And guess what happens? No miracles.... No hope!

Healing happens when some among us take insulin – a late nineteenth century miracle started by a Canadian surgeon Frederick Banting. God’s hand was on him to help solve the ‘sugar disease.’ And how many of us have had x-rays taken? Everyone right?

Marie Curie was born in Warsaw in 1867, the daughter of a secondary-school teacher. She received a general education in local schools and some scientific training from her father. Over many years, Curie became highly respected and did much work in the field of radiation. With her husband, she was awarded a Nobel Prize for Physics in 1903, for study into spontaneous radiation. It was her acceptance of the miracle of hope – sustained by persistence that led to the great strides in medicine that have come about from x-rays. Because mankind has benefited so much from this – I believe we can attribute this miracle to God’s intervention in our lives.

As a holy woman Catherine Doherty said, “All the great discoveries of science, physics and medicine get ignored. We forget that God inspired special people to struggle, seek and discover hidden secrets of HIS creation. God gives talented physicians and researchers the skill and foresight to use his Almighty skills.” Catherine also said, “Imagine two hundred years ago – no radio, television, airplanes – they all would seem like a miracle back then.”

And so -- I want to share the miracle of Hope with you all. In a sense, speaking as if I was speaking to a place filled with graduating students getting ready to take a message of hope out into the world. And in fact, this weekend is when many celebrate graduation of young men and women -- We want to send them off and our challenge is to send them off with HOPE. But they may not have hope in them because they haven’t been formed to see miracles and holy events happening around them. They’ve come here and they see a priest or a deacon in old fashioned, non-typical garb. They see people stand and sit and kneel... but what does it mean?

Our young folks hear words read or proclaimed about miracles... Stories of lepers cleansed.... the dead brought back to life... bread and wine changed into our God... They wonder, how are any of these possible? Is it any wonder that soon after they gain seeming independence, many will begin to question the truth and hope in what we say... what we proclaim?

Through the gift of hope from the Holy Spirit, my goal is to remind all of us of the miracle of seeds that die in the moist, rich earth – only to spring back to life and become fruit trees or wheat ... or the gift that God gives us as co-creators with Him so that from an intimate embrace between a man and a woman comes a most wonderful miracle – the miracle of new life...

And there are other miracles – the miracle of an addict who turns his or her life around – walking away from the tragic misjudgments that led to dependence upon chemicals... the miracle of someone mentoring a young boy or girl and sharing friendship enough that the youth gains confidence and begins to see that he is worth loving and attention...

Each generation calls for the spectacular – but miracles are not an end in themselves – they are signs that point to the reality of God. And the reality is that God exists. And in reality, we honor Him, in spite of our weakness... our brokenness. We worship Him in what we do here in this sanctified building we call Church. We can honor Him elsewhere – for sure. But we come together as His family – in response to His invitation. We do this on Sundays – at least one day each week... a day of thanks and praise for the miracles He has shared with us.

There is another miracle – I've preached about this on national holidays in recent years. The miracle that I refer to is America – it too survives weak, flawed humanity... it survives mistakes and nay-sayers and prophets of doom... Even when a goodly number of citizens wonder if it has completely lost its bearings – God will not let the gift of American blood spilled on other shores – the gift of freedom and peace in other times brought about by us and shared with other peoples... God will not let this miracle of America wither and die. Remember: next weekend is Memorial Day. Let us say a red, white and blue prayer for the miracles of our service men and women.

So today, my message has been on the miracle of Hope in the Holy Spirit, hope in our Church and in our Country. Hope in the reality of miracles happening around us all the time... I've shared with you my testimony that we can find hope – a gift from the Holy Spirit when we come together in worship in our Catholic Faith... May the Spirit of Hope come upon each of us – let us invite Him – beg Him to descend upon us. Let there be such a sound of worship – that those passing by will be certain that they are hearing a noise more powerful than the strongest wind produces. Let those inside of this building come to be on fire with a love of God... a love of their Church – and a love of Country. God bless those who graduate. You are the miracle of our hope for the future. God bless families where God's miracles happen in spite of our weakness and brokenness. God bless those present here. May you all leave with a rebirth in HOPE. And may we all be open and prayerful to experience one or more gifts of the Holy Spirit. And may God bless America.