

052707 PENTECOST SUNDAY

Today – God willing – I'd like to speak on one powerful theme, the gift and the virtue of HOPE. And in the allotted time that I have – I want to try to relate hope to a red, white and blue homily about: 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.

The Gospel that I just read for Pentecost 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 there in the room have faith before Jesus came to them? Well – I believe they did have faith except the crucifixion and death and now persecution – all of these events conspired to damage, or perhaps 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 – 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. It is my thought that HOPE is so especially needed in all of us; we are not much different than the disciples in the upper room – often shrinking from the 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 that upper room needed was a miraculous rebirth of hope.

For many of us – sadly perhaps 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 rebirth of the gifts given to us at our Baptism and our Confirmation.

Do you believe in miracles? Many 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 them as commonplace. And guess what happens? No miracles.... No hope!

Here’s a miracle: 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 what they called 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 worked much in the field of radiation. Together 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 rugged 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 a little more than a 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 is the weekend when many churches celebrate the graduation of young children and young men and women. We send them off – and our challenge is to send them off with HOPE.

Here at our parish, graduating students will be leaving soon. Many young people have come to this very church and they witnessed miracles. They came here – but I wonder how many young folks, just like adults came to see what happens here as normal... maybe even worse – a form of old-fashioned, old-folks normalcy. They see a priest or deacon dressed in old-styled, non-typical garb... they see people stand and sit and kneel. 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 virtual independence, many will begin to question the veracity of 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 grass or 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 that 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 – one day each week... a day of thanks 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 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.

Today, my message has been on the miracle of Hope – of the reality of miracles surrounding us all of the time... I’ve shared with you my belief that we can find hope – a form of gift from the Holy Spirit when we come together in worship in our Catholic Faith... It is interesting that the theological virtue of Hope was found in the writings of Saint Teresa of Avila.

Her focus would never have been on medicine and x-rays and a land of the free and the brave... but her words are about hope.

“Hope, O my soul, hope. You know neither the day nor the hour. Watch carefully, for everything passes quickly, even though your impatience makes doubtful what is certain, and turns a very short time into a long one. Dream that the more you struggle, the more you prove the love that you bear your God, and the more you will rejoice one day with your Beloved, in a happiness and rapture that can never end.”

May the Spirit of Hope come upon each of us – let us invite Him – beg Him to descend upon us. Inside this Church – or any Church, 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 driving wind produces. Let those inside 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. Thank you for your dedication and accomplishments in spite of the weakness and brokenness that we have all displayed. God bless all those in worship this Pentecost. May you experience a rebirth of HOPE. And may we all be open and prayerful to experience one or more gifts of the Holy Spirit.

And may God bless America.

Reading 1

Acts 2:1-11

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled,
they were all in one place together.

And suddenly there came from the sky
a noise like a strong driving wind,
and it filled the entire house in which they were.

Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire,
which parted and came to rest on each one of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in different tongues,
as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven
staying in Jerusalem.

At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd,
but they were confused
because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

They were astounded, and in amazement they asked,
“Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans?
Then how does each of us hear them in his native language?”

We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites,
inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,
Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene,
as well as travelers from Rome,

both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs,
yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues
of the mighty acts of God.”

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

R. (cf. 30) Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!

How manifold are your works, O LORD!

the earth is full of your creatures;

R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever;

may the LORD be glad in his works!

Pleasing to him be my theme;

I will be glad in the LORD.

R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

If you take away their breath, they perish

and return to their dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created,

and you renew the face of the earth.

R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

Reading II

1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13

Brothers and sisters:

No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit;

there are different forms of service but the same Lord;

there are different workings but the same God

who produces all of them in everyone.

To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit
is given for some benefit.

As a body is one though it has many parts,

and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body,

so also Christ.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,

whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons,

and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

or

Rom 8:8-17

Brothers and sisters:

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh;

on the contrary, you are in the spirit,

if only the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

But if Christ is in you,

although the body is dead because of sin,

the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,

the one who raised Christ from the dead

will give life to your mortal bodies also,

through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Consequently, brothers and sisters,

we are not debtors to the flesh,

to live according to the flesh.

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die,

but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body,

you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,

but you received a Spirit of adoption,

through whom we cry, "Abba, Father!"

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit

that we are children of God,

and if children, then heirs,

heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,

if only we suffer with him

so that we may also be glorified with him.

Gospel

Jn 20:19-23

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 to them, "Peace be with you."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.

Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,
and whose sins you retain are retained."

or

Jn 14:15-16, 23b-26

Jesus said to his disciples:

"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.

"Whoever loves me will keep my word,
and my Father will love him,
and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.

Those who do not love me do not keep my words;

yet the word you hear is not mine
but that of the Father who sent me.

“I have told you this while I am with you.
The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you everything
and remind you of all that I told you.”