

PENTECOST 051505 CYCLE A

Some of you know how much your pastor and Deacon Tom love our young people. Our best wishes to those completing a school year – and especially those graduating soon.

It was a great joy to my heart to be a small part of First Communion recently... and I have to tell you a true story with a smile in it. One of the young girls who received her First Communion invited her best friend to attend. Later, I asked the girl – who was your friend? She told me her name. I then said, “Is she Catholic?” “Oh no Deacon Tom, she’s not Catholic – she’s a Christian.”

Don’t you just love the sweetness and innocence of most kids at this age? There is another form of youthful innocence that I want to remind us all about. I see some young folks here with us at this Mass. Do we have any young-at-heart folks who remember what it was like to be between 3 to perhaps 8 years of age? Have you ever had a special friend in your life that no one else could see? Now adults might call it a make-believe friend... but to the young person who experiences this kind of a friend, it is a real one that only the young one could see.... If I asked the adults – I wonder if any of them would admit to ever having such a ‘special, unseen friend.’ I would be willing to bet there are children in this parish... children in this valley... children everywhere who would tell you that that at one time or another, they have had a special friend that only they could see ... someone who was always there... always available... someone to trust... someone to feel safe with.

Now with that as the introduction – let me share an interesting fact with you... children are mentioned 54 times in the Gospels... We just know how much Jesus loved and welcomed children... and what was the most memorable of His comments? It's found in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost... it is the birthday of the Church... we ought to have bought birthday cake ... enough cake for everyone... but especially for our children so that we can share with them the feast of the coming of the Holy Spirit... But also to tell them who and What the Holy Spirit is...

The Holy Spirit is God, as the third person of the Trinity... But among many other forms of His power and presence, He is our unseen friend. Do you older adults recall the famous Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dr. Albert Schweitzer? He once said that the 'highest knowledge is to know that we are surrounded by mystery.' And mystery is what it seems like when we talk about having an unseen friend – in this case, one named the Holy Spirit.

Not only are we surrounded by mystery, but the very Mystery of God dwells within us. The Scriptures and our tradition hold firmly and consistently that our experience of God is threefold: God creates us, God redeems us in the person of Jesus, and like the dry bones of us sinners, the Holy Spirit animates us and helps us to live holy lives.

God continues to lead and guide us in the person of the Holy Spirit. One God, three persons — mystery upon mystery. But the Holy Spirit is the One that in some ways helps dispel mystery... that helps us to have faith... that comes when a flawed and weak priest calls upon the Spirit to sanctify ordinary bread and wine at the Mass ... the Spirit is the one that comes upon our young adults when they are confirmed... the Holy Spirit is our unseen friend... and all we need to do is become child-like again... willing to believe... willing to accept.

If I used the expression 'whistling in the dark' – how many of you would know what I'm talking about? Let me make a little personal confession to you. About three years ago at this very time of year, I was out walking our dog Holly near that big white Stanley Hotel... and I came around a big boulder and surprised a very large mother elk. I was chased by that elk and that episode resulted in fractured ribs and a punctured lung. So now when I go out at night to walk Holly near that same area, do you know what I do? I often whistle in the dark to let any elk and bobcats and any other critters know that I'm in the area and coming through.

But you know what else I do... I often say these words, "Come Holy Spirit and protect me against all evil... protect me in soul, mind and body..." I do that because I accept that the Holy Spirit can be summoned... can be invoked... and while He is God Almighty, He is also our unseen protector and friend.

He is the same Holy Spirit the Father sent to proclaim his Son at His Baptism in the Jordan... the same Holy Spirit who came as tongues of fire in that upper room... the same Holy Spirit who can unite us as Christians.

Is the Holy Spirit only active with us Catholics? Not at all. When Mother Teresa of Calcutta died on September 5, 1997, a Hindu professor from a university in the United States asked a bishop if he could speak at the Mass of Thanksgiving. After Holy Communion the native from India stated with great emotion that Gandhi was an instrument of justice for his people and that Roman Catholic Mother Teresa was an instrument of charity and love. The Holy Spirit blows where he will, bringing justice through the political leadership of a Hindu, freedom through the counseling of an agnostic, truth through a pastoral letter of a bishop, charity through the commitment of an order of sisters.

In all human relationships, God's Spirit is what brings them together. When a life is changed through the channel of another person – it is God – the divine third who always makes the change using a person as a means. Now hear this – and hear it well... No personal relationships can be entirely right without the presence of God's Spirit.

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Now... if we had more time, I'd have the ushers pass out some paper and some pencils with no erasers. I would give us all an exam.

Do you know what would be on the test? For today, Pentecost – question number one would be: Name the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Question Two: Where can you find the gifts listed or itemized? Question Number Three: Are any of the gifts of the Spirit present in your life? How about in your family? How about in your relations with your neighbors? How about at Church? I would not mark your test scores on a curve... it would be a pass/fail test. How would you do?

The biblical origin of the seven gifts is found in Isaiah (11:1-3) where he foretells the qualities of the Messiah. These seven gifts are the signs that the Spirit will guide the Messiah. Throughout the Gospels we see how these seven gifts form Jesus' personality and characterize his actions.

The relation of these gifts to the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders becomes clear when we remember that the word *Messiah* (*Christos* in Greek) means "anointed." Jesus was "anointed," filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism. At Confirmation we are anointed with the Holy Spirit. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are the manifestation of the Divine Power active in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

So what are they? In the order they are recited in the Rite of Confirmation: [1] wisdom, [2] understanding, [3] right judgment, [4] courage, [5] knowledge, [6] reverence and [7] awe. I could preach a sermon on any one of those gifts...

How reverent are you in entering God's house? Do you demonstrate God's unseen mystery to your children? Do you help plant seeds in them so that they will become filled with awe? Do you reverence all life from natural conception till natural death?

It is Pentecost – when we pray any words today about the Holy Spirit – may it remind us that He is God and the third Person of the Trinity... that He is a divine manifestation – a gift from the Father and the Son... and though unseen... He is willing and anxious to be our friend... our guide... our source of the same gifts given to Jesus when He was in the Flesh.

Come Holy Spirit. Come unseen Friend. Peace be with you.