

**PENTECOST - 2008**  
*“The Spirit Within”*

Last week we heard Jesus commission the disciples saying, *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* We took it seriously. And by golly, we taught what Jesus taught, and we did it with great confidence knowing that we were right. We even went so far as to say that error had no rights, and we got ourselves into terrible things like the Inquisition, when we even executed some of those who disagreed with us. The trouble isn't that we tried to teach the truth as we saw it, but the way we went about it. What was missing was the Spirit of Jesus in what we taught.

It is not by accident that when Jesus confers to the Church the power to forgive sin, he did so when the disciples were most aware of their own sinfulness. Peter had denied Jesus three times, and the rest of their lot had abandoned him or remained silent. It was at that moment when they were most humiliated by their weakness and in need of mercy from God that St. John has Jesus commissioning them, not to teach, but to be instruments of mercy, instruments of reconciliation. And to empower them to fulfill this commission, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into their hearts.

Reconciliation has to be the work of the Church because that is the work of the Holy Spirit. Sin divides, separates and brings chaos, while the Spirit brings order, unity and peace. If what the Church does in the world is not somehow about healing the human heart, or the wounds between people, or of bringing nations and peoples together, all the while showing sensitivity to the weak and the powerless, we would have to wonder if it is truly doing the work of the Holy Spirit.

Pope Benedict XVI came to the United States a couple of weeks ago to help heal the wounds in the American Church caused by the terrible sexual abuse scandal that sadly still festers. Clearly, he was doing the work of the Spirit, but more work needs to be done, yet what he did was important. If we bring the two commissionings together, to teach and to reconcile, we have the formula for effective ministry. We must do the truth in love. If we just teach without love, the gospel will be a turn-off to most. And if we just love, without the guidance of the Spirit of truth, we could end up compromising the power of the gospel itself. We need both. We need to teach and live the truth as we understand it, but we must do it all in a Spirit of Love. And that Spirit of Love comes to us only when we are responsive to the Spirit of God within us.

Pentecost is critical to the success of Christianity in the world. We Christians will make the gospel of Jesus believable and real to the world only if we are living in the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Pentecost, ourselves. We may know the gospel by memory, verse by verse, but that will not form us into vital Christians. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

There was a famous Shakespearian actor giving a one man performance. The people hung on his every word. When he finished, they stood and cheered, shouting "*Encore!*" "*Encore!*" After they settled down again, he said he would like to do Psalm 23, the famous "**Good Shepherd**" psalm, for his encore. The people were thrilled. "*The Lord is my shepherd,*" he began. Everyone listened, deeply impressed with the power of his voice and his command of the psalm. When he finished, the theater erupted into wild applause once again. The audience rose to its feet.

Just then, an old man of small stature walked up the aisle toward the stage. When he arrived, he asked the famous actor if he might also recite the "**Good Shepherd**" psalm. Everyone was in a good mood, so the actor said, "*Why, yes, of course.*" The old man began, "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want . . .*" He hadn't given more than three lines when an unexpected silence fell over the crowd. Pretty soon, the people were hanging on his every

word. They were obviously moved. By the time he finished, many were in tears, so touched had they been by the old man. Bravos seemed out of place as the people showed their appreciation. They quietly rose to their feet, almost in reverence of the old man. The actor, himself moved, leaned over to the old man and asked, *"How did you do that? It is obvious that you are not a trained speaker, yet you touched the people in a way I never could."* *"The difference is simple,"* said the old man. *"You know the psalm, I know the shepherd."*

We must live in the Spirit. That and that alone makes us true Christians. But I am not going to tell you to try harder. Rather, I just want you to be aware of the Spirit working in you already. So often we just don't recognize it. For example, do you have a desire to please God in all you do? Why? Could that not be the Spirit at work in your heart? Do you have an abiding joy about you? Didn't Jesus say he wanted his joy to be ours? Couldn't that be the work of the Spirit, too? How do you explain it? About four times in the last week I asked people how they met their spouse, and three of them, after their first encounter, said, *"I just know that's the person I'm going to marry."* One gal didn't even know the guy's name yet. (Poor guy didn't have a chance.) How did they know? What was leading them, or rather, was it a "who" leading them?

Why do we get all choked up when we see the reunion of families when soldiers return from Iraq? Why do we hurt for them when they wave goodbye as they deploy? The work of the Spirit is reconciliation, not separation. Are we not simply responding to the Spirit's joy and sadness going on within us? Why do we reach out to total strangers in times of crisis? Well, if the Paraclete is literally "the one who answers the cry," it's because we cannot help ourselves when we see hurt and pain. We are caught up in the preferential option for the poor and not even know it. It comes from being made in God's image. Our young people may be

disappointed that they didn't get some big rush when they were confirmed a couple of weeks ago. But don't be surprised if in your future, a sense of your career becomes clearer to you. It's still a mystery to me how I became a priest. You may even find yourself rethinking the kind of person you want to marry, or rather where you marry. Why not? The Spirit of God is in you, loving you, guiding you.

And we honor our moms today because we know the Spirit of God works through them in powerful ways. You know how a prism breaks up light into the colors of the spectrum, ROYGBIV. Well, I think mothers are like those prisms, but they break up God's love flowing through them into those divine qualities of one, true, good and beautiful. Think about it.

We are to speak to the Annual Catholic Appeal again this week. And where does the generous heart come from? It, too, is a gift of the Holy Spirit. When we recognize that all we have is gift, it's not hard to respond to those who turn to us in need. You have good and generous hearts. I remind you that 63 agencies of the Archdiocese need the support of the parishes of Western Washington. We spoke more in detail last week, so please read the materials you received in the mail, and please fill out the envelope and hand it in today if at all possible. This will cancel the need for us to write to you by mail in a follow up letter.

- Take envelope
- Fill it out
- Hand it in.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in us the fire of your love. May the Eucharist we now celebrate continue the transformation of our hearts.