

THE SURPRISES OF PENTECOST

(Acts 2: 1-11; 1 Corinthians 12: 3b-7, 12-13; John 20: 19-23)

Here is a scene that some parents might find familiar. It is Sunday morning and a Mom hurries to her son's room and says "it's time to get up. Come on, we will be late for church." The son says "I don't want to go." The Mom insists and says, "now, don't give me an argument; get up, we're going to church." The son says "I'm not going and I will give you two reasons why not: first, it's boring and second, I don't like most of the people." The Mom says "you're going alright and I'll give you two reasons why: first, you're fifty-one years old and second, you're the pastor!"

Maybe you were surprised by the way this story ended. Pentecost is about surprises. It is about the disciples' being able to speak to the heart of everyone in the crowd at Pentecost (as the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles says). The Spirit gave these followers of Jesus the courage to preach the gospel and to make converts, despite the language barrier. This must have surprised the heck out of the disciples who had formerly been scared-y cats. Pentecost is also about the gifts of the Spirit that are manifested in each individual for the benefit of the whole body of Christ (as the second reading from 1 Corinthians proclaims). And these gifts sometimes take surprising forms in each Christian. And Pentecost is about the power to forgive that Jesus gave to the church when he appeared (in John's Gospel) to the disciples in the room where they were hiding – the precious gift of forgiveness that comes through the Spirit and that is experienced in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and in our everyday lives. Sometimes we surprise even ourselves when the Spirit's power enables us to forgive others and even ourselves – which is often the hardest part of forgiveness.

The Father sent the Spirit on the church to be our advocate and guide until the end of time. Jesus had promised the Spirit when he was about to return to the Father and he made good on this promise. The Spirit has been springing surprises on the church and her members ever since.

This is graduation time and the Spirit has been at work in the lives of our young people who have grown in holiness during their high school years. It is a wonderful experience to see so many of our youth taking part in the Liturgy as servers, readers, ministers of the Eucharist, ministers of music, and ushers. It is great to watch the evolution of their prayer life as it deepens. It is an example to all of us to see the energy of young men and women put at the service of the poor. All of this is true not only of high school kids, but of children of all ages. In our parish, there is plenty of work that the Spirit has given us the grace to do, regardless of our age. We surprise ourselves with what the Spirit does in us to get us closer to God and help us to serve the Body of Christ. Tiny tots visit the nursing homes once a month – and totally delight those they visit. The Kindergartners in our school are praying for a woman who is struggling with a tough illness. The children of the parish in middle school regularly make sandwiches for the poor. Junior high and senior high kids respond in a variety of ways, from helping out with canned food drives to assisting at projects at the Community Kitchen at Holy Rosary/St. John to traveling the Gospel Road at Cranks Creek KY. Among adults, there are armies of communion ministers for those who can't come to Sunday Mass, armies of visitors to the sick, armies of folks lending a helping hand in many practical ways here at the parish and in the larger community, and (above all) armies of Spirit-filled

parishioners who are always ready to pray for the sick and those in any need. The Holy Spirit of Pentecost never rests and never stops supporting the work of God in surprisingly beautiful ways.

[At this Mass, we honor the graduates of the numerous high schools which lie within our parish boundaries. I encourage you grads to continue in your future to be open to the Spirit who will be your advocate in any difficulty and who will never fail you as you grow in goodness and in service to the church and the world. The surprising Spirit will strengthen you to keep the commandments and to become the saints God is calling you to be.]

To all of every age, I remind you that the Holy Spirit can take any good act and magnify it in surprising ways. I recently heard the story of a kind pastor back in the late 1800s who made room in a crowded Sunday school class for a little girl whom the teacher had sent away because there was no room. Two years later, this little girl died of a disease, as children often did in that era. But she left 57 cents to the pastor so that he could build a bigger church. This little bequest so inspired people, both in the parish and in the wider community, that it led to an immense outpouring of generosity as this child touched their hearts. Today in Philadelphia there can be found, as a result of this girl's 57 cent-gift, Temple Baptist Church that seats 3300, a huge building for Sunday school, and Temple University, founded in 1884 under the direction of Rev. Dr. Russell H. Conwell, the good pastor who treated the little girl with such kindness. This is the Spirit at work in an enormously surprising way.

I would like to conclude with another reminder to everyone here regardless of age [and especially to the graduates present]. I recently read of a speech by Greg "Dobie" Moser, a youth minister and catechetical leader in the Catholic Church who was at one time the Director of Youth Ministry in our own diocese. His advice was to remember to build on the strengths the Holy Spirit has given to everyone as a gift. Dobie said we live in a time when we are told we can be and do whatever we want. But this is unrealistic. He continued: "You can't be whatever you want to be, but you can be more of what you already are." (Crux of the News, May 11 2009, p. 3).

So I say to all [especially you graduates], be more of what you are – prayerful and holy men and women with servant hearts whom the Spirit will guide and support in surprising ways as you keep growing into the unique persons God calls each of us to be!