

Pentecost and the Universal Call to Holiness

If you're a parishioner, you know that the focus for this entire year—which really pretty much ends today, in terms of our program year—has been the universal call to holiness. That means that each and every one of the baptized is called to great holiness, is called to be a saint.

So, we spent a good part of the first part of the year on a homily series really laying out: what is holiness, what is this universal call, and how does it fit in with me? Then after Christmas, we spent a good amount of time in a homily series focusing on vocation—meaning that our vocation, or calling, that God gives us is a primary way that we live out that universal call to holiness and become holy.

Today we fittingly end on the great Solemnity of Pentecost, because it is in fact the Holy Spirit who makes us holy. It is in fact the Holy Spirit who lives within us and enables us to be more and more conformed to the heart of Jesus, and more and more into the image and likeness of God in which we are created.

Two weeks ago, I challenged us in terms of a little meditation on Confirmation. That was occasioned by the fact that the first reading was about the Catholic theology of Confirmation and why the bishop does it, but also because that weekend was four days before the Archbishop himself came to give that Sacrament of Confirmation.

During that homily two weeks ago, my main emphasis was on the fact that the entirety—yes, the entirety—of the Pentecostal grace that was given to the apostles, as we hear in today's first reading, was also given to you in its entirety when you were confirmed, without qualification. That entire Pentecostal grace was given to you in its entirety when you were confirmed.

So why aren't most of us out there doing what the apostles are doing? Well, we're all called to live this out in a different way. Not all of us are called to be apostles, as our second reading gets at within the Body of Christ. We all have a unique role in doing this.

But the primary reason that maybe we're not as fully alive with that grace of the Holy Spirit as we should be is related to a concept that goes back to the Middle Ages, but is still very much current in our theology. I used this really big word and challenged you to use it in a regular sentence during the week. I was joking, but that phrase is *reviviscientia sacramentorum*.

Do you remember? Okay, you probably wanted to forget it.

The concept is that the sacraments—oftentimes the permanent sacraments, especially Confirmation—need to revivify in some way. That’s what the first word is: *reviviscentia*. Meaning that although the entire sacramental grace, the entire Pentecostal grace, was given to you in the Sacrament of Confirmation in its fullness, it’s there in potential. Its actuality depends on us. And there can be blocks within us that keep that sacramental grace from being fully alive in what it should be.

So I challenged us two weeks ago to think not so much at Pentecost, “What extra graces do I need?” No, not “What extra graces do I need?” but, “What graces do I already have that aren’t fully being lived out? What is potentially blocking my ability to live that out?”

That was the challenge, and I think that continues to be a challenge.

A Personal Relationship with the Holy Spirit

For that to really be lived out, though, the Archbishop reminded us at Confirmation that a mature spirituality means we’re leaning into a relationship not just with God as Trinity, as some kind of esoteric, faraway Trinity, but we’re actually called as Christians, in a mature spirituality, to have a relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jesus is often the easiest for us. For some people, the Holy Spirit is easiest, and for some people the Father is easiest. But we’re called to lean into all of them.

It got me thinking for today that I want to briefly get at two hallmarks of working on that personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. Those two hallmarks are what it really looks like to have a relationship with the Holy Spirit—including their blocks, because each of them has them.

The first question I want to ask you—and the answer may be obvious because you’re at Mass today, but I don’t think it’s necessarily that obvious—is this: do you desire to be awake, or do you desire to be asleep?

I ask that as a serious question. I find there are many Christians who really would rather be mostly asleep in terms of their spiritual life, rather than being fully awake. There are many reasons for that. Or let’s put it this way: they are somewhat indifferent to their spiritual growth.

Indifference is one of the barriers to a relationship with the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit makes us awake, makes us alive. And if we would rather be asleep, then that is going to be a barrier to a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. That’s the first one.

The second hallmark of a relationship with the Holy Spirit that we should be leaning into is a desire for God to use us. So that's the second question: do you desire that the Holy Spirit would use you, even when it's a little bit inconvenient, or would you rather be left alone?

I find there are not a small number of people who practice the faith who, if you really got to the bottom of it, would rather be left alone.

Dear friends in Christ, if you're indifferent, or if you would rather be left alone, we call that self-determination—not in the good sense, but “I determine for myself what this looks like.” In which case, it's really hard for the Holy Spirit to form a relationship and for Him to use us.

Or are we willing to take the risk that being alive and the Lord using us is actually a really beautiful and exhilarating thing?

I know from experience, and experience working with people in my own life, that when I live this out well—which isn't all the time—it's actually pretty exhilarating. It's not a heavy responsibility. To be awake and to be used by the Lord is exhilarating.

Worthiness, Desire, and the Holy Spirit's Fire

I want to get to one block before I wrap this up. There's one other block, I think, to people's concept, and this is more mental than heart. Being indifferent, wanting to be left alone, and not really wanting to give the Lord permission to use us or to be inconvenienced that way—that's a problem of the heart. But there's also a problem with the head, I believe, in terms of thinking about the Holy Spirit.

This is pretty straightforward. A lot of people think that for God, for the Holy Spirit, to really show up for us—for Him to really show up for us, or to really just show up—first we have to be holy to a certain level.

“Well, I'm not worthy of the Holy Spirit showing up for me.”

You know what? You're right. You're not worthy. Who of us could possibly claim that we're worthy for God the Holy Spirit to dwell within us? That's the reality. When you're baptized, God the Holy Spirit dwells within you. You're not worthy of it. So don't worry about being worthy of it. Get it?

But a lot of people assume that for the Holy Spirit to really show up, “I have to have my act together. I have to have a certain level of holiness.” The problem with that is that it is God the Holy Spirit who makes you holy.

So it's not a matter of worthiness. It's a matter of desire. That's the key with the Holy Spirit. That's my experience in my own life. That's my experience working with people: that those

who desire for the Lord to use them, and desire to be alive, the Holy Spirit will show up, and sometimes in very wondrous, surprising, and exhilarating ways.

Holiness, by the way, is not moral perfection. Holiness, or kadosh in Hebrew, does not connote moral perfection. It connotes being set apart for the service of God, which is just another way of saying we're giving God permission to use us.

Dear friends in Christ, when we ask the Holy Spirit to show up and we mean it, the Holy Spirit will show up. And when we give the Lord permission to use us, and we're working on a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit through desiring to be alive and desiring to be open to His promptings, He tends to show up.

The holiest priest that I have ever met personally says all the time, "The Holy Spirit tends to go where He is wanted." Not where we are worthy of it, but the Holy Spirit tends to go where He is wanted.

So dear friends in Christ, don't worry about the worthiness. You ain't worthy. I ain't worthy. Let's worry about the desire.

So dear friends, if you desire for the Holy Spirit to be more active in you, and to press in a bit to that relationship personally with the Holy Spirit, I invite you to quietly repeat the following prayer after me:

Come, O Holy Spirit.
Holy Spirit, come.

Sanctify my heart.
Live in me more deeply.

May Your fire be inside of me,
and may You use me for Your glory,
for my sanctification,
and for my joy.

Amen.