

Homily for Pentecost, 2019

9 June

The Power of the Spirit

Many of you know that, on this Pentecost, I am soon to begin another chapter in my life. I connect what I am about to tell you with today's feast because what we remember today, that the Risen Christ has given His Holy Spirit to the Church, is central not to me as a priest but to me and to you – especially those of you who are about to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation – as Baptized Christians. Christ has called us all to do his work in whatever part of the world and in whatever phase of life He places us.

When I went to confession most recently I found that I most needed to confess was opportunities missed. Times I could have been more effective in representing and embodying the Risen Christ than I was, due to my lack of attention, lack of courage, or lack of wisdom.

It is exactly these gifts – attention, courage, wisdom – that are on offer through the Holy Spirit; today our Church reminds us that the Risen Christ is ready to act, eager to act, in the situations Christ puts us in each day. But Christ needs us to join Him, recognizing possibilities for greater truthfulness, for greater justice, for reconciliation between adversaries, for healing of injuries, for company in suffering, and for wonder at the beauty of the world and of each human person. Christ's Spirit is present and ready to act with and through us – if we notice and trust.

Each day can begin a new chapter in each of our lives, whether that day is marked by a special celebration, as it will be today for the six of you who are to be Confirmed, or is just an ordinary day of getting about our business, as most of our days are. Today's invitation is to open our eyes, hearts, and minds to the potential for good that God's Spirit now builds into each day.

It's no doubt difficult to remember this potential, much less to trust it, in the face of personal difficulties or of the entrenched, stubborn wickedness of parts of our world. But I would like to offer you a metaphor for this day and for the Spirit's work; I invite you to take it home and to think about it. From the Scriptural story we just heard the Holy Spirit is often pictured and imagined as fire, and as a mighty wind. True enough, since they are visible signs of the Holy Spirit's transforming power. But we rarely experience change on that scale, and there are

other, simpler signs of transformation. Perhaps more to the point for our daily discipleship is something we can notice every day, an image also familiar to us from the Gospels, for Jesus himself regularly talked about seed growing silently, fields planted with wheat, grapes growing, trees budding, as images of the silent power of God's work in our midst. Perhaps we today can best remember God's Holy Spirit ready to show itself when we see around us and pay attention to a simple thing like this, in the words of the poet/songwriter Malvina Reynolds:

God bless the grass / that grows through the crack;
They pour the concrete over it / and try to keep it back.
The concrete grows tired / of what it has to do;
It breaks and it buckles /and the grass grows through.
God bless the grass.