

6th Sunday of Easter
Cycle C
May 26, 2019
Deacon Stuart Neck

Our gospel today has Christ speaking to his Apostles preparing them for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Christ spoke to them on other occasions about him sending the Holy Spirit, but until they actually experienced Pentecost, they really didn't understand what this meant. When I first thought about what to discuss today in this reflection, I thought I would give us a refresher about the Sacrament of Confirmation which is our Pentecost.¹ But as I reflected further, I realized that from Easter to today and continuing to Pentecost which will be celebrated in two weeks, we have had an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in sacramental grace.

At the Easter vigil, the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist were administered. For those who were baptized, they also exercised the sacrament of Reconciliation before the vigil. Two weeks ago, we had first communion for the second graders who all went to the sacrament of Reconciliation as well. Later today, forty three of our youth will receive the sacrament of Confirmation, and on Pentecost those adults in our parish, and throughout the diocese, who have spent the last fourteen weeks preparing for Confirmation will receive this sacrament as well. The Easter Season is in essence a "season of sacraments." So

¹ CCC 1302

instead of talking about one sacrament, I thought it would be appropriate, in this season of sacraments, to discuss the purpose of the sacraments and how they can work in us to help us achieve a life of holiness and salvation. Due to time, I will mainly focus on the sacraments of Initiation.

Now, to fully appreciate what and how the sacraments work in our lives, and the power the Holy Spirit given to us in sanctifying grace, we need to begin back in the Garden of Eden. In the Garden, *“...man was not only created good, but was also established in a friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him...”*² *“Adam and Eve, were constituted in an original state of holiness and justice.”*³ This state of original holiness is man’s state before the fall where they lived in a, *“...participation in the inner life of God himself, in his holiness.”*⁴

Therefore, God’s plan from the beginning was to have man partakers in his divine state.⁵ Our Catechism teaches us that in this state of original holiness, man was, *“...unimpaired and ordered in his whole being and was free from the triple concupiscence that subjugates him to*

² CCC 374

³ CCC 375

⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, Pauline Books and Media, Boston, MA, 2006, page 191 (16:3) ⁵ Lumen Gentium, 2

*the pleasures of the senses, covetousness for earthly goods, and self-assertion, contrary to the dictates of reason.”*⁵ However, with the fall, all of this was lost, but mankind was not! As fallen creatures, we are, “...wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin...” But God did not give up on man, and as St. Paul tells us, “...where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through the justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”⁶ The Holy Spirit that Jesus speaks about coming in today’s gospel will be sent on Pentecost and is the fulfilment of God’s plan of our salvation after the fall by giving us the means to return to a state of holiness.

Though we cannot replicate original holiness, with the sanctifying grace we receive in the sacraments, we get very close. Our Catechism states, “*The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the Body of Christ and, finally, to give worship to God.*”⁷ Sanctifying grace is the grace that, “*heals our human nature wounded by sin by giving us a share in the divine life of the Trinity.*”⁸ St. John Paul II discussed in his

⁵ CCC 377

⁶ Romans 5:20-21

⁷ CCC 1123

⁸ CCC Glossary

teaching on man's relationship with God, which we know as Theology of the Body, that the state of original holiness, which he calls original innocence, was a state where we had all the graces of what it *fully* meant to be being created in God's image with its, fullness and deepest dimension being determined by grace.⁹ God gave us the Holy Spirit and a Church to be the means of partaking in this divine grace and have the means to be partakers in the divine life and to return as close as possible to the state of original innocence.

Our return to original innocence begins with the sacrament of Baptism. In the sacrament of Baptism, when the water is poured on us, and the words of baptism are said, we enter into the body of Christ and die to sin and are born again to a new life in Christ into his mystical body. It is through the body of Christ that the Holy Spirit resides and the outpouring of God's grace occurs. The waters of Baptism purify us from the stain of Original Sin, justifies us and finally sanctifies us.¹⁰ We are infused with the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, and infused with the supernatural moral virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude.

⁹ Man and Woman He Created Them, page 177 (16:3)

¹⁰ CCC 1227

We are also given prophetic and kingly charisms and initiated into the common priesthood. With the sanctifying grace we receive in this sacrament, we once again become partakers and sharers of God's own divine life by making us temples of the Holy Spirit where God, as trinity, indwells in us. With the Holy Spirit in us, St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, *"If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life of your mortal bodies also, through the Spirit that dwell in you."*¹¹ We believe the sacrament of Baptism is necessary for salvation because this is what our Lord stated. In chapter 3, of St. John's gospel, our Lord tells Nicodemus, *"...no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."* This is what we teach about baptism and from this alone, we can see our path back to the state of original holiness has begun.

In the sacrament of Confirmation we receive the grace of Pentecost and perfects the grace received in Baptism.¹² Our Catechism teaches us that in this sacrament, we, *"...are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit."*¹³ This is achieved in the gifts of the Holy Spirit which enable

¹¹ Romans 8:11

¹² Rev. James Socias, *Introduction to Catholicism (Didache Series)*, Midwest Theological Forum, Woodridge, IL, 2011, page 272.

¹³ CCC 12856

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us, “...to spread and defend the Faith by word and deed as a true witness to Christ.”¹⁴ Since Easter, we have been reading from the Book the Acts. It’s always amazed me how different the Apostles were after Pentecost. Before they always seemed to say the wrong thing or were tripping on their words. However, there is no mistake of their change from the power of the Holy Spirit working in them to preach and defend the faith in word and deed. That same Spirit and the same gifts are with us as well to do the same. Finally, with the sacrament of Eucharist, we complete the sacraments of initiation. From the sixth chapter of St. John’s gospel in the “Bread of Life” discourse, Christ explicitly teaches us, “*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remain in me and I in him.*”¹⁵ This sacrament is the fulfillment of this passage. In the Eucharist, Christ gives himself completely to us in body, blood, soul and divinity. When we receive the Eucharist, as we will in about twenty minutes, this spiritual food preserves, increases and also renews the life of grace received at Baptism. Additionally, all of the charisms, graces, virtues, gifts and fruits we receive in the other sacraments are renewed and

¹⁴ Introduction to Catholicism (Didache Series), page 277.

¹⁵ John 6:54-56

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spiritually energized to keep them ever active in us and allows us to be partakers in the divine life and, to the extent possible as fallen creatures, return us ever closer to the state original holiness and stay in there. Additionally, we are united with Christ and with each other through the communal nature of our baptism and this sacrament. In the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist we, *“...receive increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.”*¹⁶

What has been discussed in these three sacraments shows us that God never gave up on us and has given us the full means to achieve salvation in the Catholic Church which administers the sacraments and is the means of receiving the Holy Spirit flowing from these sacraments. Now, with all that said, it's important to note there's a catch....we have to want this and open our hearts to this grace. Our gospel today touches on this where Christ states, *“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.”*¹⁷ Our free will can either stand in the way of sanctifying grace and our salvation, or be the means of it. If we live in a life of sin or see the sacraments as something our parents told us to do, but never fully

¹⁶ CCC 1212

¹⁷ John 14:23

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engage in the grace we receive, then it's just another "nice to have." But if we live the sacramental life and have grace working in us, then we can see the sacraments are an *incredible* to have!

In the Old Testament, God spoke of bringing the Jewish people to the promised land, a land he said is, "flowing with milk and honey." Under the new covenant, the Catholic Church, with the sacraments and the Holy Spirit alive in it, this is the land of milk and honey! This is the promised land! This is the fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation until the end of the time. God has set all of this up to give us a means to be reunited with him as we were originally in the Garden of Eden in a state of grace and holiness (this is what JPII stated).

As we approach Pentecost, let us all take the time to do a spiritual inventory as to where we are in our sacramental life. To the extent possible, frequent the sacrament of Eucharist. We should go to the sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a month, be active in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Finally, have a daily prayer regiment. We have a spiritual director here in our parish that can help you with this.

In closing, I leave you with this quote from St. Peter in his first letter where he states, "...[Y]ou are a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy

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nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”¹⁹

Amen

¹⁹ 1Peter 2:1-3