

Pentecost Sunday 2020 SML

A great amount of spiritual power is found right here, in this Church, and during this pandemic, in this parking lot. It is mainly through the laity, through Church goers, that the Church enters into the world. You and I are the meeting places of:

- ✓ the Christian and non-Christian,
- ✓ the sacred and the secular,
- ✓ the religious and the irreligious.

You and I fulfill our Christian vocation in the world. When we come to Church, we receive God's love through the community, God's truth through the scriptures and God's grace through Holy Communion, to encounter others who lack the richness of God's love, God's truth and God's grace. And we encounter the world so the glory of God is made manifest.

There are two dangers. One is that we form a kind of ghetto, confining our religious activities only within the Church. This is so prevalent today, when secularists use as their argument "freedom from religion," rather than "freedom of religion." No Nativity Scene at town hall. No prayer at graduation. No. You can have freedom of worship, but confine your prayers and your values to your church. When we started

outside Masses, I thought there might be pushback, given the pushback we received this time last year when a peaceful pro-life prayer for pro-life legislators was posted on our church sign. I spoke to Medford Police since our outside Masses have been offered, and they haven't heard one negative word for which I am so very grateful.

The other danger is to become so much like the world that we lose our salt, and as a result, we could do nothing to change the world.

The result of separation of religion from the world is that culture has become uninhabited by Christ. If we are to be effective, we have to be aware of the fact that we are members of the people of God who belong to a Church that the world hates, which was foretold by Our Blessed Lord when He said, "The world hates you because of Me." (JN 15:19) So when people ask me, "Father, how is that the Catholic Church is the object of the last acceptable prejudice?" I respond, "That's a feather in our cap because Our Blessed Lord predicted it."

Because we are hated, we must be theologically literate. If we are to communicate with the world, we must be able to articulate our Catholic faith. Part of the reason why we are hated is because much of what we believe is misunderstood by

nonbelievers. As one of my favorite authors, Fulton Sheen, once wrote, “The enemies of the Church often do not hate the Church; they only hate what they erroneously believe to be the Church.” We also must be in a place to articulate the faith, so we need to be in the thick of it: computers, world affairs, social injustice, everything, and most recently, the evils of Communism. We need to stand where the Gospel intersects the world.

Our Blessed Lord was not crucified in a Church above six candles, but in the world, on a roadway to and from the city dump called Gehenna. Our Lord was crucified at the intersection of the civilizations of Jerusalem, Rome and Athens; hence, the inscription above Him was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. He placed himself at the very center of the world, in the midst of smut, thieves, soldiers and gamblers. And from that intersection, Our Crucified Lord extended pardon to them.

The point to being articulate in the faith, and standing where the Gospel intersects the world is for those who meet us to say, “I want to be like them. I want to have their love, their truth and their inner peace, which is the Holy Spirit.” Jesus

breathed on them and said, Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit.

We also need to have the power, wisdom and courage as witnesses for Christ. If we were left to our own devices, we would be as weak as the Apostles were; nine of them never came near the garden, and the three that made it, slept in the garden.

Above the natural life, there is divine, supernatural life. We were born into that divine, supernatural life at Baptism, and confirmed that divine, supernatural life at Confirmation, venues of grace for the Holy Spirit to give us the power, wisdom and courage to prepare us to stand with Christ at the crossroad where the Gospel intersects the world.

At His Baptism in the River Jordan, the Holy Spirit prepared Our Blessed Lord to articulate the Gospel to the devil. From the Gospel of Luke:

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days to be tempted by the devil. (LK 4:2)

The Holy Spirit also anointed Our Blessed Lord to articulate the Gospel in His hometown of Nazareth. Again, from Luke:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me. He has anointed Me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. (4:18-19)

The Holy Spirit does not give us grace just to be good. Goodness is too often confused with passivity. I may have shared with you the story of a guy I used to lift with at the gym when I was at St. Benedict. In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, we were busy right across the street from the gym converting an empty supermarket into a hurricane recovery operation. After about a month, I returned to the gym, where this guy boasted, "Father, for the last month, I never missed a workout." Really. Because across the street we were running a hurricane recovery operation that could have certainly used your muscle, and you never missed a workout. His defense. Why are you give me a hard time? I'm a nice guy. Well being a nice guy doesn't walk the dog and it doesn't butter the bread.

There are a number of people who are considered "good," when really, they do not have enough courage to do either a very good or a very bad act of any kind. There are plenty who are just plain good and never miss a workout. There are few who are heroically good, and we need not look any further this past Monday, than the men and women whose lives were

given for our great nation. We need not look any further than this pandemic, where men and women are putting their lives on the front lines to care for those diagnosed with Coronavirus.

During this time of social distancing, it's hard to find the opportunity to articulate the faith. But after the restrictions are lifted, how will you describe your time during the pandemic? Peace filled? Quiet? Will people you speak with say, "I wish I were like you. I wish I had his love, his truth and his inner peace, which is the Holy Spirit." And since we might be looking at another round of COVID when the weather gets colder, what opportunities will there be to share the peace we have with those who do not have it?

We need to be heroically good, articulate the faith, and willing to stand at the intersection of the world and the gospel, so that those who meet us will say, "I want to be like them. I want to have their love, their truth and their inner peace, which is the Holy Spirit." Jesus breathed on them and said, Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit.