

Pentecost A,B,C 2021

To be Catholic is to belong to a faith that is rich in symbols and gestures. But unfortunately, when we were young, we often did not learn the meaning of those symbols and gestures, or as we get older, we forgot the meaning of the symbols and the gestures. And since rituals are such a significant part of our public worship together, these gestures and symbols, so rich in meaning and purpose, can all too easily become empty, rote and meaningless.

Take for example, the holy water font. Often times, we come into Church and just pass them by as if they weren't even there. And how many, even after a year of empty holy water fonts, still extend their hand out of habit, a good and holy habit.

The point of the holy water font is to call to mind that we were baptized in these very waters, that we became adopted sons and daughters of God. Blessing ourselves with holy water is a repeated reminder that baptism was not a one-time event. We were not baptized, and that's it. We are called to live the lifestyle of baptized Catholics. So every time we reverently and intentionally make the sign of the cross, we call to mind the

salvific deed of Our Crucified Lord, the price He paid for us, so that we can become his sons and daughters. At the same time, we ask His forgiveness for times we failed to live the lifestyle of a baptized Catholic.

How about the gesture that some of us don't even know we are supposed to do during the Creed? When we say the words, "and by the Holy Spirit, He was incarnate of the Virgin Mary became man." We are all supposed to bow our heads while praying that line.

For all the gestures we do, it's important to remember we are not purely spirit. We are not angels. We have bodies. And because we have bodies, we express ourselves bodily. Our gestures are supposed to mean something. A handshake means "welcome." A hug means "affection." And how we long to offer a handshake and a hug after a year of being deprived of it. Bowing in the Creed means "humility," reminding us of the amazing humility of God. God became one of us, just like us, out of His extraordinary love. And so we bow, for our bodies to remind our spirits what God has done.

We could go on. Genuflecting to the tabernacle, the sign of the cross on our foreheads, our lips and our hearts at the beginning of the gospel. But there is one symbol I'd like to

focus on today, on the Feast of Pentecost and it's this candle, the Easter Candle, also known as the Paschal Candle. This candle has been lit at every Mass for the past 50 days, since Easter. It was lit for the very first time on Holy Saturday night, outside, for the greatest Mass of the year, the Easter Vigil. It was lit after sunset when it was dark, and it was brought into a dark Church, three times chanting, "*Light of Christ.*"

The Candle of course symbolizes Jesus, who referred to Himself as the Light of the World. I am the Light of the World. Much like any other light, the light of Christ reveals. Christ reveals first who God really is. He ends forever, the lie and the accusation:

- ✓ that God is not good,
- ✓ that He is distant,
- ✓ that He is uncaring,
- ✓ that He is uninvolved,
- ✓ that he is disinterested,
- ✓ that He is absent.

And He proves it, once and for all, by the total giving of Himself on the Cross, out of love for us.

Jesus not only reveals who God is; since Jesus is truly God and truly man, Jesus reveals who we are, in every way. It

is only really by knowing Jesus that we can truly know how to be human. To know:

- ✓ how to pray
- ✓ how to work
- ✓ how to play
- ✓ how to love
- ✓ how to be a friend.

So first, Jesus reveals who God is, second Jesus reveals who we are, and third, Jesus reveals, as light often does, dangers, obstacles, hazards, and provides a sense of safety.

So Jesus reveals to us, without any qualms:

- ✓ the danger and the reality of sin,
- ✓ the brutality of sin,
- ✓ that sin leads to death,
- ✓ that it destroys relationships,
- ✓ that it's harmful,

and St. Paul listed them in today's second reading:

- ✓ immorality
- ✓ impurity
- ✓ lust
- ✓ idolatry
- ✓ sorcery

- ✓ hatred
- ✓ rivalry
- ✓ jealousy
- ✓ outbursts of fury
- ✓ acts of selfishness
- ✓ dissensions
- ✓ factions
- ✓ envy
- ✓ drinking
- ✓ orgies

and the like.

And so, for the last 50 days, this candle has been lit here to symbolize the presence of Jesus for the 40 days from his Resurrection and the Ascension, plus the 10 days from the Ascension to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, which we celebrate today.

But after today, the candle will be snuffed out. And it will never again be lit, except for baptisms and funerals. So what does the symbol of the unlit candle mean? It's simply this. Now, after Jesus has ascended into heaven, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, and descends upon you and me, it is up to you and me to bring His light into the world,

which is much more important and much more difficult than it sounds. Every time we see that candle unlit, which is to say every Sunday that we walk into church, we will be reminded to bring His light out there.

There is a myriad of voices that try to tell us that while in here it's fine to have faith in Jesus, but that's a private matter and it's not to be shared. Well Jesus tells us otherwise. For sure, faith is a personal encounter between us and the Lord, but it is meant to be shared, just as the Apostles were driven to go out by the Holy Spirit that first Pentecost to tell all those that they met the great things that God has done for us.

To be Catholic, the Church, Who is Jesus, exists to make Jesus known, whether those out there want to hear it or not. Because let me tell you, there are people out there who need to hear about faith and don't even know it.

Former Archbishop of Philadelphia Charles Chaput is one of the most articulate leaders of the Church. He was asked, "What is the best way that Catholics can serve their country?" A timely question with Memorial Day next weekend. His answer? Don't lie. Don't lie. If we say we are Catholic, we need to prove it and live it, without apology. Jesus says in the Gospel, "You are the light of the world. No one lights a lamp

and puts it under a basket. You put the light on a stand so that everyone in the house can see it.” The house is the world. The light is you and the light is me. We are lit with Jesus’ spirit so as to burn brightly. When we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us pray for the grace to be His light in a world so full of darkness.