

The 6th Sunday of Easter -- May 17, 2020

In the coming two Sundays we will celebrate two feasts – next Sunday the Ascension which closes Jesus’ earthly life and then Pentecost which in the gift of the Holy Spirit reveals the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to be us always.

These final movements of the Easter season prepare us to go forth to love and serve the Lord and to be signs of God’s presence. We have all rejoiced in all that Jesus has done and taught and want to go forth but it is hard to go forward alone especially when the way of Jesus is different and above and beyond the values and ways of the world around us.

I know that whatever I want to do, it is only if I have even just one person that will support me or work with me that thing will happen. In most things it is difficult or impossible to do things alone.

So it is that even though Easter celebrates the resurrection and departure of Jesus from us, at the same time our Sunday readings also want to make us aware of how Jesus is remaining with us. In the gospel today, Jesus promises his disciples at the Last Supper that he will not leave them orphans. He will not be physically present in the same way he was before, but it seems that an even greater connection with him is being offered.

Last Sunday we heard Jesus tell his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them. Now he tells them that this dwelling place is much closer than they expect --- “On that day, he says, you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.” Jesus has chosen us as his dwelling place. His place is within us and within each other.

We see a similar connection emphasized in the Church at large in today’s other readings. No matter how far the Church spreads out as it grows in size, ties must exist between the new church communities and the mother church at Jerusalem – between the newly ordained deacons such as Philip and the first apostles, Peter and John.

Wonderful things were happening in Samaria through the teachings and miracles worked by God through Philip. Today's reading says that "the rejoicing in that town rose to a fever pitch." It seems that little else was necessary. However, we also heard that the mother church at Jerusalem felt it necessary to send Peter and John to them who then prayed over them that they might also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It seems that St. Luke in narrating this is carefully distinguishing between the sacrament of Baptism and the sacrament of Confirmation and between the ministry of the deacon Philip and that of the apostles and the need for connection between all of them.

These unifying structures of the Church are not meant to stifle the Church but to empower it. We know that joy and energy to act are among the special gifts of the Holy Spirit. St. Peter in the second reading today writing to the newly baptized in such places as Samaria urges them to speak gently and respectfully to each other in order that unity and the family spirit among them would always be preserved.

Likewise, in today's gospel, Jesus twice declares that those who love him are those who keep his commandments. He is calling for order and respect for all within the community of his followers. It is not out of fear or legalism but out of love for him that we carry out his commandments. He wants us to remain in his love, but in the end, it is how we keep the commandments that will determine if we are in a true relationship with Jesus or not.

And what precisely are the commandments of Jesus? His commandments can be summed up in one word: love. However, the simplicity of this command does not make it easy to follow. To truly keep Jesus' command to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves is to be constantly drawn beyond ourselves. It is all about serving God and the common good.

Jesus gives these words to his disciples on the night before he made the complete gift of his self on the cross. In the Eucharist, he continues to give us his body and blood to unite us with himself and to

strengthen us to imitate him and communion of life with him and with each other.

He himself has been our first Advocate and now he also promises to send us through his constant intercession for us another Advocate – the Holy Spirit to be with us always and help us and keep us connected and growing in unity.

The Lord knows that we alone cannot sustain faith and union with him and his manner of life without help. So more than we realize, he has provided the supports that we need to keep connected with him and each other. ---- But – do we see that need and how necessary it is? Maybe these days of social distancing have helped us see the need for the Church, the Sacraments and each other and that it is okay and necessary to need each other.

Those who see these needs are struggling the hardest these days not being able to receive the sacraments. These are the ones who in spite of the extra effort required are connecting with others through social media, internet, radio and TV.

As we become aware of needing the support of our church family, we also are becoming more aware of our need for greater connections with each other within our own families – with our spouses and children and grandchildren. We need these connections socially, emotionally and psychologically, but we also need them spiritually. In a world that does not talk about God and more than often scoffs at and mocks religion and faith, how will we or our children keep our faith if we are not daily speaking of God, praying together and helping each other see the presence of God in our world. We don't need to be theologians to share with others where we saw God during our day.

We can't sustain or go forth in faith alone, and that is one thing that our social distancing is helping all throughout the world to see more clearly. That is why I am so excited to see more people joining in on-line faith sharing programs such FORMED and others that are being offered. Whether in on-line groups or in person, in our homes, in groups in our parish or larger

community of faith, we all need to be doing some kind of faith sharing and simply telling others what God is saying to us and has done for us.

That is why I am excited that we have a men's spirituality group that will be beginning for all interested men on Sunday morning, June 14. There is and will be more information coming out on that in our Sunday bulletins.

Jesus has not left us as orphans. He promised to be with us always in the sacraments, and when we do not have them, we always have him with us in the Church community when two or more are gathered in his name **and** we have the Holy Spirit always with us and we will celebrate that at Pentecost in two weeks.

Let us make time to recognize and to praise and thank God for this presence with us and within us. Let us help each other to see and celebrate the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit with us and let us make them present through the gift of ourselves to each other in love. Jesus promises that whoever loves him will be loved by the Father and by him, and that he will reveal himself to them.