

## **Solemnity of Pentecost / Year A / May 31, 2020 (Fr. Giese)**

My Dear Parishioners, I truly want to thank you for being with me this morning for the celebration of Pentecost. It means more to me than I can adequately convey but I do want you to know that I am truly grateful that after all this time of separation you are still part of this community of believers who are lifting up prayers with one another during the Mass. It is a wonderful testament to your enduring faith in God.

It was my hope that this would be the last Sunday with churches being closed here in Montgomery County. I had expected that we would be able to publicly celebrate Mass in the church beginning with the first Sunday of June. In fact, we had taken steps and made preparations for Mass with all the required health precautions that have been directed for public safety.

However, those plans will have to wait, at least for now. On Friday, the Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich, announced at a news conference, that beginning tomorrow, June 1st, churches would be allowed to have outdoor gatherings and outdoor services. I was not expecting that. While having Mass outdoors is something that a number of people have suggested and something I was considering, conducting our full schedule of Masses outdoors is quite another thing and presents a number of challenges as you might imagine. However, after giving it some thought we began making some plans for celebrating Mass outdoors, using the parking area near the school gym. It may still come to that, but not yet.

Yesterday, I was alerted that County Executive Elrich's published order does not allow outdoor gatherings and outdoor services. What are authorized are drive-in religious services. Let me read to you from the county executive's order. (Read the Order)

To be honest with you, if it is the case that only 'drive-in' services are permitted then I am not sure what benefit that would be since the county executive's Elrich's order denies people who attend such a drive-in Mass from receiving Holy Communion. Now, I believe that we can celebrate Mass with people present and do so in a way that protects the public health, safety, and welfare. I believe that the limitations placed on churches and other religious groups are unnecessarily restrictive and burdensome and not equally applied. And I have communicated that to the County Councilman for this area, Andrew Friedson. I encourage you to contact him

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and the county executive's office as well to share whatever thoughts you may have on the executive order.

This week there may be developments and further guidance from Archbishop Gregory and the county. I will also be in communication with the parish council about the situation. We will keep you informed through the emails we send out and through our parish website. Your understanding and patience in this situation are greatly appreciated.

What I would say to you now, as we celebrate Pentecost, is that we are still blessed, gifted, and inspired by the Holy Spirit as a Church, as a parish, as families, and as individuals far more than we sometimes realize, especially with the gift of fortitude. Fortitude is one of the seven gifts of the Spirit which are found mostly in the book of the Prophet Isaiah. They include wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. All of the gifts are important for a full, Christian life. Each gift has a place in our lives and each one enriches us. But it is the gift of fortitude which is so important now.

What is the gift of fortitude? The gift of Fortitude, as defined by one priest, is an unwavering commitment to God which is revealed in moral strength, courage, determination, patient endurance, long suffering, a resolute spirit, stamina, and resiliency. I will admit that it is not as attention-getting as the tongues fire that came to rest on the apostles or speaking so that everyone can understand you in his own language but fortitude was just as much on display in the apostles that day of Pentecost.

They had been confined and out of sight for a period of time but they had faith. They had seen the risen Jesus. He had been with them on several occasions. So, they encouraged one another. They prayed together. They did not give up. They were aware that the enemies of Jesus were still there but they did not give up. That was the gift of fortitude from the Holy Spirit at work in them giving them endurance and strengthening their commitment to Christ Jesus, their friend, their Lord, and their Savior.

The Holy Spirit is at work in you too. If you have taken time to pray for others, for yourself, for your family, for those in need, for those who are grieving, for those who are in pain, that is

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the work of Holy Spirit giving you fortitude. If you have encouraged others during this time of stress even when you have needed it yourself, that is a sign of the fortitude that comes to you from the Holy Spirit. If you have made an extra effort to be charitable, to do more, to be happy that is the work of the Holy Spirit giving you fortitude. If you have continued to support the parish even though it has been weeks since you have set foot inside the church, your commitment is a sign of the fortitude that the Holy Spirit gives you is at work in you. If your desire for Holy Communion has grown rather than diminished that is a sure sign that the Holy Spirit is at work in your heart and soul. If you have made gifts to ease the plight of others that is also a sign of the strength given to you by the Holy Spirit.

Today, the Church celebrates Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. It is the birthday of the Church and the beginning of the witness it gives to the world of Lordship of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit still comes and comes to you even now with powerful gifts. We too are giving witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ by remaining faithful to him. And a day is coming when we too will give witness to all the world that Jesus is Lord and that we, his faithful friends, are still here.