

## Homily for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Parting words are very important. You may have had a close relative or beloved friend who has died, and yet you can still remember the last words they said. For example, I remember there was a parishioner, who died some time ago, who I had visited for some time each month, bringing him Holy Communion. We had talked about many things in that time – one of them being cars, and how I was contemplating back then of replacing my old car. Then, on his death bed, after I had just given him the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, he said, “Get that new car, Father”! I’ll never forget those words. And, as God’s timing would have it, I finally replaced that old car just last week!

Also, last week – Thursday to be exact – we celebrated the Ascension, which marks that definitive moment, when 40 days after His Resurrection on Easter, Jesus ascended into heaven to return to the glory of His Father. At Thursday’s Mass, we heard the following words from the Acts of the Apostles: “Jesus enjoined the Apostles not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for ‘the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.”

Poof! Gone! Left with the parting words of Jesus. And what did the Apostles do? Exactly what Jesus told them to! Today's reading picks up right where Thursday's left off – "After Jesus had been taken up to heaven the apostles returned to Jerusalem...when they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, and they all devoted themselves with one accord to prayer."

What were they praying for? Exactly what Jesus told them to pray for – "the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak – the Holy Spirit. For in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth."

There's that word again – POWER. I said it in last week's homily. And here it show's up today (and I didn't plan that)! The Holy Spirit is God's very POWER, who enables us to live the lives that Jesus commands us to live! I said last week, "if you really want to take your faith seriously, intentionally cultivate a relationship with the Holy Spirit. As you go throughout your day and temptation comes, or fear or doubt is knocking at your door, or one of your bad habits is trying to exert itself, surrender yourself to Jesus, and ask God to send you His Holy Spirit. Directly ask the Holy Spirit to fill you to overflowing, so that God's Spirit can imbue your spirit so that you can truly and really have the strength you need to keep God's commandments and do His will."

What was God's will for the Apostles? To be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. But how could these lowly fishermen do something like that? The Holy Spirit! So, what is God's will for you? What does God want you to do in your life? I don't know – but if you ask God, He'll show you! But I do know how you'll be able to do it – as the Prophet Zechariah (4:6) says in the Old Testament – “not by might, not by your own strength, but by God's Spirit”!

My friends, this time between the Ascension and Pentecost is a time for us to do the same thing that Jesus told the first Disciples to do – to go wait and pray to be baptized in the Holy Spirit! That word baptized literally means “plunged into” or “immersed”. So, for us to be baptized in the Holy Spirit doesn't mean some new sacrament, but rather, it means we allow ourselves to be completely immersed into the Life of the Spirit. We give control of our lives to God, seeking God's will and not our own, and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to carry this out!

Next week, during the homily, I'm going to pray for you, that the Holy Spirit may be poured out into your lives in an ever deeper way. Yes, we each received the Holy Spirit on the day of our baptism. And yes, we each had our own personal Pentecost the day we were confirmed. But, as I've learned – with God, there's always more! And so, I will guide you through a meditation for the power of the Holy Spirit that you received in Baptism and Confirmation to be released in your life in a fuller way.

“As you wait and pray during this coming week, ask the Lord if there is a particular part of your life that He wants you to open to Him for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Is there a particular cross, weakness, or fear where you have been trying to “handle things” on your own? During this time of preparation, ask the Holy Spirit to soften your heart, preparing for Him to come in power, helping you to surrender to Him *every part of your heart* in a new way.”

I’d like to close with a short story that can help this make sense, especially since this is Memorial Day weekend. “One thing I really enjoyed doing during the summer was making iced tea at my friend’s house. We would put a huge scoop of crystals in the bottom of a large glass, fill it with water, and then madly stir. Well, one day my friend’s sister decided to try it. She put the crystals in the glass, poured in the water, and then, without stirring it, drank the whole thing. Yuck! What was left was a pile of soggy iced tea mix at the bottom. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit Himself is like that powered iced tea mix – we have to stir Him up! If we really want to be Disciples of Jesus, it takes more than just adding water. We need to be stirred.”

So, prepare yourself this coming week for Pentecost. Read over Acts 2 again, and pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.” God bless you.