

Pentecost “The Gift of Peace”

Fr. Frank Schuster

My friends, earlier this week I woke up feeling grumpy. Has that ever happened to you, when you catch yourself just being grumpy? Memorial Day was rainy, my day off on Tuesday was mostly grey and cloudy. I haven't been able to visit family in person in months. However, later in the week, Governor Inslee finally gave us permission to have outdoor masses with up to a hundred attendees. And that filled my heart with joy. We are going to make this happen, folks. We are going to make this happen. I have sincerely missed worshiping with all of you in person. After the governor's announcement though, I confess my joy rapidly transformed into terror when I looked at the long list of requirements expected of us when we do reopen. And then, as I started working on all of that, I got grumpy again.

And so, I decided to pray to God about all of this. And oh, I let him have it. I decided to give him my long list of reasons why I was perfectly justified in feeling grumpy. Every item I listed had their many sub-points. Have you ever done that? And, you know what? God responded to me. Yes he did! How did God respond to me you might ask? Well, God inspired me to put my list aside for a moment so to look ahead to this Sunday's Gospel reading to consider what I might be preaching about. And, so I did. When I saw this Gospel reading staring back at me, I smiled. I couldn't help myself. God was talking right at me. I am still smiling about this Gospel reading because, there is the Risen Jesus standing before the disciples. What is he doing? He shows the disciples his glorified wounds and says, “Peace be with you”. After everything Jesus went through, there he is, offering us the gift of peace. I only mention it because I think this Gospel reading comes at a good time for all of us.

You see, there are so many adjectives to describe how the disciples were feeling before Jesus appeared to them. I don't think “peaceful” was one of them. They were feeling guilty about fleeing Jesus when he was arrested. They were feeling mournful in the wake of Jesus' crucifixion. They were also feeling afraid, hiding from the authorities out of fear for their lives. The Risen Jesus appears before them and says, “Peace be with you”. How very strange and how very wonderful! Jesus continues, “As the Father sent me so I send you”. Jesus breathes on them, giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit and now these disciples are apostles. The word apostle comes from the Greek word meaning “sent”. What a turnaround of events. Jesus offers them peace. After they receive that gift of peace, they are sent out to the world as Apostles.

You see, for the Gospel of John, it is helpful to understand that there is a theology being articulated surrounding the idea of being sent. A way of understanding this theology is that in antiquity, when a king sent an ambassador to a neighboring kingdom, that ambassador was expected to be treated just the

same as if that king was there himself. And so, Jesus is sent to us by the Father. This makes Jesus and the Father one. Just as the Son was sent by the Father, and the Holy Spirit is sent from the Father and the Son, the Apostles are now one with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They become God's ambassadors and are sent to save the world, nothing short of that. They are sent to save the world by welcoming believers into the inner life of God himself, to become one with God by the waters of baptism and the forgiveness of sins.

What is the characteristic of an ambassador of God? Jesus says, "Peace be with you". This means a defining characteristic of a Christian sent by God is the gift of peace. I only mention this because, we are well into the third month of this pandemic and the gift of peace can sometimes feel like in short supply. Even in the best of times, we can sometimes find it hard to live in peace with others, with family members, with neighbors, people we don't agree with, the list goes on. As if the pandemic wasn't enough, there is still a lot of hate and violence in our world as we see in the news every day. Our hearts go out to all those effected by the violence we are seeing in Minneapolis and other cities. We pray for peace, and that prayer for peace in my mind should include a prayer for justice for everyone involved. However, everything that happens in the world around us has a way of truly effecting us spiritually.

This is why I think it is helpful that, on Pentecost the Church recalls the Risen Jesus appearing before the disciples and saying, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me so I send you". As disciples of Jesus, we sincerely need that gift of peace and we need to share that gift with others. How do we get there? In my experience, the journey towards peace begins by committing ourselves to the habit of prayer. It begins with prayer, my friends. It begins with prayer. If it becomes necessary, we need to calendar prayer into our day every day. You see, when prayer becomes a priority over the endless tasks we perform, when forgiveness becomes a priority over the grudges we cling to, and when hope becomes a priority over the fears we entertain, the Holy Spirit can finally transform our existence and life just simply gets better. It just simply does. On Pentecost, we acknowledge as Christians just how much we really, really need the Holy Spirit in our lives right now. And when we receive the peace that comes from the Holy Spirit, we can't sit still. We become sent. We become sent to share this gift of peace with others, at home, at work, in the community, wherever we go. And so, as we did last weekend, it feels appropriate to continue our prayer: "Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle 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."