

Homily
2OrdA
January 14/15, 2017
St. Bernard Church
Deacon Tim Sullivan

John the Baptist says of Jesus in today's Gospel: "He is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit."

What does that mean? Those of us who have been baptized know we were baptized with water. But if someone asked us simply, "Were you baptized in the Holy Spirit?" what would we say?

In Chapter 1 of the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus, after His Resurrection, tells the apostles to wait for "the promise of the Father," for John the Baptist "baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." He added, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

When the Holy Spirit did come, at Pentecost, He appeared as tongues of fire. He came to rest on each of the apostles, and they all began to speak in different tongues. Instead of being fearful about being persecuted as followers of Jesus, they began to speak publicly and forcefully about faith in Jesus, and the growth of the Christian faith exploded.

St. Paul lists some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12. They are supernatural wisdom, supernatural knowledge, faith, healing, mighty deeds, prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues. All of these gifts were manifested in the early Christian community as described in the Acts of the Apostles.

So when did we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit like the apostles? At our Confirmation.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Sec. 1302, it says that "the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost."

You might be thinking, as I am about my own experience, "Wait a minute. I don't think I received any of those gifts when I was confirmed."

Well, we did.

My guess is that many of us have received gifts which we have not clearly identified and which we have not yet dedicated to building up the Body of Christ.

What I'm saying is that each person in this church this evening has probably received a special gift, a charism, and maybe even more than one, from the Holy Spirit.

This charism is not simply a talent you have. It was something given to you by the Holy Spirit. It was not chosen by you, though it's your choice whether to use it and how to use it. It was given to you to build up, to enhance, the Body of Christ on earth. It's meant to share with others.

This charism has a supernatural quality. It produces results that go beyond anything you can do with your natural ability. It may not be as dramatic as the gifts listed by St. Paul, but it is still very important in God's plan.

Your charism, to give some examples, could be administration, craftsmanship, art, music, leadership, service, teaching or even just having a helpful attitude, such as encouragement.

These charisms are activated when we make an act of surrender to Jesus Christ, when we accept Him as our Lord and Master, and commit to using our charisms to build up His Church.

It is then that the Holy Spirit brings a new quality to our lives, and our gifts become linked to the gifts and to the needs of others and take on a whole new power.

The Holy Spirit is like the Maestro, the conductor, and we are all members of His orchestra. He connects us, He links us together in ways that would never happen if we were just left to our own decisions.

Here is how this works, in the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria:

All of us who have received one and the same Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit, are in a sense blended together with one another and with God... He binds together the spirits of each and every one of us,... and makes all appear as one in him. For just as the power of Christ's sacred flesh unites those in whom it dwells into one body, I think that in the same way the one and undivided Spirit of God, **who dwells in all**, leads all into spiritual unity.

The power of all of this is renewed and increased every time we go to Mass, and put our gifts, our personal charisms, on the altar, represented by the bread and wine. Msgr. Gaalaas then asks the Holy Spirit to come upon these gifts and make them holy, make them into the Body and Blood of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit does this.

These gifts become holy, then they are shared with the rest of us gathered at Mass. Then we are sent out to share these holy gifts with others, to bring Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit to the world, each of us in a way that no one else can do.

Each of us was created for a specific meaning and purpose. And we have been entrusted with certain gifts to fulfill that meaning and purpose.

When we put these gifts to work, when we consciously decide to embrace God's plan for our lives, the results are very powerful, very beautiful.

Each of us has an enormous spiritual potential. This potential is realized when we humbly acknowledge our gifts and dedicate them to serve God and His people.

I'll close with a few lines from the Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful,
And enkindle them in the fire of Your love.
Send forth your Spirit,
And we shall be created,
And you will renew the face of the earth.