

We have the Gifts

Romans 8:14-28 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope, we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

The Holy Spirit is our focus today on this Pentecost Sunday. He is the forgotten One of the Trinity. We can visualize Jesus from the scriptures and with the help of pictures and movies we have seen. We can see images of God in the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud leading Israel out of Egypt. Maybe we pick up some ways to visualize God from movies like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* where God is shown as a beautiful woman floating through the air until the judgment comes. We think of scriptural pictures of God as on the Mount of Transfiguration where a

cloud over shadows them. Roiling clouds with a light shining in them are sometimes associated with theophanies, or manifestations where God is visualized in real life.

Moses was hidden in the cleft of the rock on a holy mountain as God walked by. To see God's glory was to die. We don't know what God looks like. We have an idea of what Jesus looks like, but when it comes to the Holy Spirit, you only experience Him either within or in some mystical way by what He does. When we look at our expanded text in Romans 8, we see that the Spirit goes to bat on our behalf; He intercedes for us within the community of the Trinity, itself a mystery since God is one. The Spirit we are told helps us in our weaknesses. We often don't even admit them to ourselves, much less to God. But that is where you get the help. You say: "God, I can't do this on my own. I need your help. I need to know what you want me to do." The Spirit helps us even when we don't know what He looks like. A dove? A fire? A rushing wind? In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "26 *But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.*"

In John 16, we hear more about the Spirit from Jesus: 8 *When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. 12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.* If you are not obeying God, the Spirit will convict you. You can run, but you can't hide. You can reject, but you do so at your own peril. Our relationship to God isn't only about this life and making a difference in our community. Our relationship to God is also about eternal life and that's a long, long time. That's why Christian education and preaching are so important. If you're not reading a Christian book right now, why not? Try the book, Purpose Driven Life. You can choose a spiritual discipline and follow it through each week. It could be any of the marks of discipleship: worship, prayer, scripture, serving, giving. It could be resolving a

dispute. Maybe you could try recycling if you hadn't done it before. I chose applying Jesus call to 'seek first His kingdom and His righteousness' to all that I do. I sometimes use 'post it notes' to help me think about my life and activities in light of this one challenge of Jesus.

I've mentioned this spiritual growth experience, a Walk to Emmaus or a *Via de Christo* weekend. These are short courses in Christianity. They are excellent.

The Spirit can speak to us better if we open our inner doors and windows. Music, scripture, Christian reading, walks, and the like are very helpful in hearing Him.

Diedrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran pastor from Germany, said, "Every day, a quiet voice answers our cries and says, 'I stand at the door and knock.' Should we tremble at these words, this voice? The Spirit that we have called for, the Spirit that saves the world, is already here, at the door, knocking, patiently waiting for us to open the door.

He has been there a long time and he has not gone away. His is a very quiet voice and few hear it. The cries of the marketplace and of those sell goods are all too loud. But the knocking goes on and despite the noise, we may hear it at last. What shall we do? Who is it? Are we afraid or impatient? Perhaps, we feel little fear, lest someone undesirable is at the door, dangerous or with bad intent. Should we open? In all this fuss, the royal visitor stands patiently, unrecognized, waiting. He knocks again, quite softly. Can you hear him... Perhaps, he knocks at the door of your heart." (from Bonhoeffer's Christmas sermons)

The text says that the Spirit testifies with our spirit, strengthens us in our sufferings for what we believe when it's not the popular thing to do, but we need to allow ourselves to be 'led by the Spirit.' That means using the gifts He has given you in mission, living out His vision for us at St. Peter to share God's Word and love within and beyond our church.

Then, we hope for what we don't have as we inwardly groan for it, knowing what the headlines are and how broken the world is within our own country as well as throughout the world. We don't throw in the towel. What we used to do as a family is look over ten or so causes with our kids when they were younger. We as a family would look to the children's guidance to choose what we would support above and beyond our congregational support.

I saw a family interviewed on one of the morning news shows. The couple have five kids and live in Arizona where they have worked together to feed a family of seven for \$350 per

month. They do not use credit cards or have bank loans except a home mortgage they paid off in 9 years. They save till they can afford a car. The total income of this family is \$33,000/year. The father said, “We only eat out a couple of times a year. We go on vacations, but don’t go overboard. We save enough every month so that we can support people in need through various ministries and build some fun money into our budget.” They plan a menu and so only go to the store once a month to reduce impulse buying. Inflation will be a challenge for them as it is for us. But what stands out in my mind is their desire to take from a tight budget and support ministry and to say so on national TV.

We can take responsibility for telling our children about what Jesus means to us. We can use the gifts the Spirit has given us.

We have the gifts; we have the Spirit, but it is our task to let the Spirit lead us. The world would have us look out for number one and those closest to us. The world would tell us not to deny ourselves of anything we can afford or can charge. The world will tell us to rely on ourselves and be dependent on no one. The world will tell us not to take a stand for anything - for conflict should be avoided at all costs even if it goes against integrity. But the Spirit helps us in our weakness, the text explains and goes on to say, “*we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings.*” Why would you do that? If you love someone very much, you don’t blow off their suffering. You stand with them in it, helping them in any way you can to bear it. Just like you spend time with your family because you love them, you also need to spend time with the Savior Who redeemed you and wants to grow in His friendship with you.

Our text concludes that God will work all things together for the good of those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose. That simply means we need to love Him back, follow Him, and trust Him when we can’t see the outcome.

Please bow your heads in prayer. *Send Your Spirit of truth, O God; rekindle your gifts within us; renew our faith, increase our hope, and deepen our love, for the sake of a world in need. Faithful to Your Word, O God, draw near to all who call on You; through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, to whom with you and the holy Spirit be honor and glory forever. Amen.*