

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter - A  
Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17;  
I Peter 3:15-18;  
John 14:15-21  
Little Flower - 5/21/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

The Easter Season is rapidly drawing to a close. Next Sunday we will celebrate Jesus' Ascension, and the following Sunday we will celebrate Pentecost. Already in today's Gospel, Jesus is talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as an Advocate. According to William Barclay, the Greek word *parakletos* is really untranslatable. At its root, the word *paraclete* means *someone who is called in*. *Advocate* suggests someone called in to plead a case. At the same time, Jesus called the Paraclete the Spirit of truth.

Jesus would spell out what this means in the following two chapters of John's Gospel. Jesus said, "*When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me*" [15:26]. On a personal level, the Holy Spirit gives witness to Jesus within our hearts and enables us to give witness to Jesus to the world. However, Jesus also said, "*But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth*" [16:13]. On a universal level, we believe that the Holy Spirit leads the Church to the fullness of truth. The Holy Spirit guides the Church in the development of dogma and doctrine.

Also, in today's Gospel, Jesus promises that he will not leave us orphans: "*On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.*" On a personal level, Jesus and the Father will always be present to us in the Holy Spirit living within us. There is a saying that there is someone within me who is closer to me than I am to myself, that knows me better than I know myself. That someone is the Holy Spirit. The best test of love or friendship is that two people consistently call forth the best in each other. The Holy Spirit calls forth the best in us from within ourselves.

On a universal level, the Holy Spirit, who lives within each of us, is also the soul of the Church. In other words, the Holy Spirit living within each of us unites us to the Father, to Jesus, and to one another. The Holy Spirit, then, is the life principle of the Church. The Holy Spirit makes the church alive and gives it its vitality.

Today's reading from Acts demonstrates the vitality of the Church. In this reading, we see another example of the Church's adaptability. Last week's first reading told us that the diaconate arose to handle the distribution of food to the widows of the Hellenists. Two chapters later the deacons were already preaching and working miracles.

Communities and institutions and people tend to be far more adaptable when they are young and small. The Church as Church and we as Catholics have a much harder time adapting today than they did. Change comes slowly in a Church that has been around as long as the Catholic Church has, which is not always a bad thing. For the most part, as Catholics, our ability to accept change in the Church or parish depends on how comfortable we are with change in general. However, intellectually we all know that change is part of life.

My brothers and sisters, one verse in today's reading from I Peter intrigued me: "*Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope...*" What reason would you give for your faith and your hope? How would you explain it to someone who asked?