

Ascension
Acts 1:1-11;
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13;
Mark 16:15-20
Little Flower - 5/17/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

This past week the Pew Research Center released a report which stated that “Catholicism has experienced the greatest net losses due to religious switching....there are more than six former Catholics for every convert to Catholicism.”

Before his Ascension, Jesus commissioned his apostles, “*Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation*” [NAB, 1966]. However, as Jesus was ascending, his disciples were staring intently at the sky. “*Suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?’*”

After Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples had gone back to being simply disciples or followers of Jesus. When the angels asked them why they were standing there staring at the sky, they were telling the disciples that Christians cannot be stargazers, i.e., they cannot be passive. In other words, they were reminding them that Jesus had entrusted the Church to them, that they were now responsible for fulfilling the mission Jesus had given them.

Just as the Church was entrusted to the apostles when Jesus ascended into heaven, today the Church has been entrusted to us. More specifically, Little Flower Parish has been entrusted to us. Therefore, today would be a good day to look at the strengths and the challenges of our parish. Although we are part of the Church universal as well as part of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, every parish has its own DNA.

What are some of our strengths? Both visitors and new parishioners tell us that they come to Little Flower because of our Liturgy, especially our music. Also, we frequently hear that we are a welcoming community, which for many means we respect and accept diversity and are tolerant of differences among people. A third strength is Little Flower School. I would suggest that this is really two strengths. I have never been in a parish where almost the entire parish supports the school so strongly, as evidenced by our recent capital campaign. Little Flower School embodies the mission, vision, and values of Little Flower Parish. Secondly, vouchers have not only made a Little Flower School education more affordable for many parishioners, but they have also made a Little Flower School education affordable for non-Catholics, helping us fulfill Jesus’ charge to “*go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation.*”

What are some of our challenges? In the area of Liturgy, although we are a welcoming community, our ministry of hospitality is weak. We simply need more ushers and greeters. We certainly need to do far more evangelization and re-evangelization. We need more opportunities for spiritual growth and adult religious education. Finally, we need more community outreach.

My brothers and sisters, our readings today remind us that the Holy Spirit is living and working within and among us as we strive to “*proclaim the good news to all creation.*” In Acts, Jesus promised his apostles, “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses....to the ends of the earth.*” In the Gospel, we are told that when the disciples went forth, “*the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.*” Finally, in his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul promises us, “*But grace [is] given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.*” In other words, each of us has been given a specific grace or gift to make a unique difference in our parish and community. During the time between Ascension and Pentecost, the Church asks us to pray for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this year we might also want to pray that we will discern how God is calling us to make our parish a better parish, i.e., a parish that better proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed.