

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 - 5/24/20

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. Easter is the most important feast in the Church year. Our inability to come together to celebrate Easter Sunday and the Easter season has made this Easter different from every other Easter in our lives.

Like last Sunday's readings, today's readings also offer us a biblical vision of Church and parish.

In last Sunday's reading from Acts of the Apostles, the diaconate was established to provide for the daily distribution of food to the Greek widows. Just two chapters later we are told that Philip, one of the original deacons, was already preaching and working miracles in Samaria. Their ministry expanded because there was a need and an opportunity. Today's reading from Acts demonstrates the adaptability of the early Church.

Last Monday I was talking to a former parishioner who now lives in Florida. He pointed out how much the Church is adapting to the coronavirus. Although many non-Catholic Christian churches regularly live stream services and even some Catholic churches already live streamed or recorded Mass for shut-ins, who would have thought that live streaming and recording would have been embraced so widely? Likewise, parishes are conducting meetings on Zoom, and priests are having appointments with parishioners on Zoom. When Masses resume, parishes will have the option of distributing Communion at the end of Mass or even not distributing Communion at all. We intend to continue distributing Communion in its usual place.

Once again I would remind you of what Fr. Aelred Cody wrote: "Among the constant, necessary concerns of all committed members of the Church is that of remaining faithful to our origins and to the purpose for which we exist, while adapting ourselves institutionally and individually to the requirements of our own times." These are indeed unusual times, and the Church is adapting. Our challenge is to adapt as individuals.

In his First Letter, St. Peter wrote, "*Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence.*" This verse captures another way in which we who are older have been called to adapt. When we were younger, for the most part, priests and sisters were the teachers. Today when there are fewer priests and sisters, all Catholics are called and challenged to witness their faith not only by their lives but by their words. We say parents are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. All the recent Popes have reminded all Catholics of their vocation to evangelize.

Two weeks from today we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost, the beginning of the Church. At the Last Supper, as we heard in today's Gospel, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, an Advocate and the Spirit of truth, who would be with us always.

Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as an Advocate. *Advocate* suggests someone called in to plead a case. In the following chapter, 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]. The Holy Spirit gives witness to Jesus within our hearts and enables us to give witness to him in our words and deeds. Jesus called the Paraclete the Spirit of truth. Jesus said, "*But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth*" [16:13]. We believe that the Holy Spirit is always leading the Church to the fullness of truth.

My brothers and sisters, the most important thing Jesus tells us about the Holy Spirit is that he will remain with us and be within us. In other words, the Holy Spirit is always within and among us. Jesus told the apostles that when the Holy Spirit came, "*On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.*" Even in the midst of the coronavirus, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit is always within and among us, which means that we are in the Father and the Son and the Father and the Son are within us as well.