

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, May 25th 2014

Then the apostles laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Although there have been times in my life when I never had a clear picture of the Spirit's place in my life, the older I get, the more I can feel the Holy Spirit. I am not a particularly patient person (here I can picture my family nodding vigorously) but if I am in a situation where I need patience and suddenly feel a calm and peace, I think to myself, "Hmm, a sudden patience – that's a gift of the Holy Spirit."

In the gospel from John, Jesus promises us, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." The Holy Spirit is the way Jesus carries out that promise. His life on earth was about more than three years of public ministry. Jesus tells us the Advocate, or in Greek – the Paraclete, will be with us and that Spirit will call us together and will speak for us.

The Holy Spirit is an encourager in our lives, advocating, calling us together and supporting us. When we simply don't have the words to pray, the reading from Romans 8 consoles us, saying that when we don't know how to pray, the Spirit will pray for us in sighs and groans too deep for words.

All of this support, love and encouragement is wonderful and it feels good to be a follower of Jesus. But what was that line in the gospel? "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." We don't always want to obey or even listen to what Jesus has to say to us – we want to be independent and do it our own way. So we listen to the world around us and ignore the teachings of Jesus. And we are unhappy and empty. We feel like orphans because we have orphaned ourselves, separating ourselves from a loving God who waits for us to turn back to his open arms. Pope Francis says, "The Spirit blows where it wills, but one of the most common temptations of those who have faith is to bar its path and drive it in one direction or another."

Jesus is not asking us to earn his love – we are already loved deeply and endlessly – whether we feel we have "earned it" or not. But God's plan for each one of us as human beings is to realize how loved we are and to be so filled with gratitude that we want to follow Jesus and his way of doing things. It's counter-cultural and not always understood by those around us, but Jesus asks us to follow him and die to ourselves.

That dying to ourselves, which sounds so dramatic, can be carried out quietly every day in our lives: when we put the needs of another ahead of our own; when we refrain from an angry outburst; when we reach out to those in need or become more merciful to those around us and those in our world whose desperate lives so urgently need our awareness and mercy.

The more we make our hearts like Jesus' heart, the easier it is to find Jesus in our lives, and the Holy Spirit is simply Jesus' presence in our lives right now. Pope Francis reminds us that "The Holy Spirit, as Jesus said, will teach us everything" and "is the living presence of God in the Church."

It's when we call out to the Holy Spirit with our groans and cries that we will realize we have had that strength, wisdom and love in our hearts all along. That, as the Psalm says, is when we "Let all the earth cry out to God with joy."

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