

On That Evening

I think all of us, at one time or another, could identify with how those disciples and friends of Jesus were feeling that evening of the first day of the week; gathered together in that upper-room – with the door locked – afraid, feeling alone and disoriented, empty and not really knowing what to do next.

They were motley crew of folks that were nobodies in the culture of their time. But Jesus had touched their hearts and enabled them discover within themselves and among themselves something they never knew was there: a dignity, a self-worth, a self-respect. This Jesus healed their brokenness, restored them to the image and likeness of God. They fell in love with this Jesus, they believed in this Jesus; they gave up everything to follow him and now – he was gone! ...having been savagely beaten and crucified and murdered by the very powers and principalities that had consistently ignored, rejected and oppressed them...

My sisters and brothers, haven't we all felt that emptiness, fear and disorientation at one time or another? When someone we cherish is separated from us: a child leaves home..., a dear friend moves away..., a loved one dies... and we are faced with the fear and emptiness of what to do next. I can remember my mother telling how... when my twin brother and I, who were the youngest kids, went off to college, that first day of school in the fall when the yellow school-bus stopped at the corner of our street at three in the afternoon and none of us got off the bus that day... how empty the house felt and how empty and sad she felt.

But on that evening of the first day of the week, suddenly Jesus stood before them, he breathed on them and it was then that they woke-up, became aware that they weren't alone – that Jesus was still with them, the Spirit of Jesus was within them and among them! They realize that now they actually were the Body of Christ! They realized that the Reign of God, the Realm of God was within them and among them! They saw the Light...; they were reborn...; and they opened the windows, unlocked the doors, and they went out to the ends of the earth: living and teaching love, forgiveness, compassion and healing, peace, and justice... little-by-little transforming the earth to become the world that God intended.

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Sisters and brothers, for over 2000 years, little-by-little folks – often the most unlikely of folks: most often a motley crew of broken and hurting folks – have been touched by Jesus and the breath of The Spirit; have had their Pentecost experience; have been reborn and renewed the face of the earth! When things seem to be most hopeless... there appeared a St. Benedict, a Francis and Clare, a Joan of Arc, a John XXIII, a Mother Teresa.

15 months ago the problems within our Catholic Church seemed overwhelming: financial scandals, the on-going clergy sex abuse crisis, half-empty churches, churches being closed, diminishing number of priests, a lack of credibility..., and the list goes on. 15 months ago: Pope Benedict – realizing that the Church was truly in crisis and realizing that with his age and health he was just not able to go on – took the revolutionary step to resign! ...the first time in over 600 years that a Pope resigned.

My sisters and brothers, this was a Pentecost moment for Pope Benedict and the Church. The Holy Spirit moved Pope Benedict to get out of the box and do something totally amazing: what *courage*, what *wisdom*, what *understanding*, what *foresight*! Pope Benedict – so reserved and so traditional – will go down in history as the creator of a whole new epoch in the Church!

15 months ago: the Cardinals of the Church gathered in the Sistine Chapel to choose the successor. I'm sure that they felt a lot like those disciples in the upper-room on that evening of the first day of the week: "*What in God's name are we going to do now?*" Whatever the expectations were inside the Sistine Chapel, with the doors and windows shut tight; the expectations of the Church outside, were by-and-large pretty low... Many felt that these mostly elderly, mostly white, mostly first-world, mostly traditional, men were pretty much out of touch with the reality of the state of the Church, 50 years after Pope John XXIII had opened the windows and let the breath of The Spirit come in. In fact, many felt that those Church windows were once again shut pretty tight....

Unknown to many of us, during the hours of the Cardinals' deliberations, the Sistine Chapel was struck by lightning three times! And: just moments before the white smoke began pouring out of the chimney indicating that a new Pope had been elected, the 'live-eye' camera of Channel 3 News in Rome – focusing on that chimney – revealed that a white dove landed on the roof, staring at the chimney – and shortly after, the portico windows opened, and a Pope named Francis appeared... asking the people to bless him ... A Pope named after St. Francis of Assisi – often portrayed with a dove – a lover of the poor, who renewed a broken Church of his time...! Sisters and brothers, you couldn't create a script more amazing than that!

Now, 15 months later: yes, we are still a Church in crisis, we are still a Church that is hurting, ...still a Church where all agree, we are faced with major problems; but certainly, a Church that is beginning to experience a new Pentecost: a Church beginning to experience the fresh breath of The Spirit, that – with all our weaknesses and dysfunctions, all our humanness – *will continue to renew the face of the earth!*

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A number of us remember another upper room experience a bit closer to home. On the weekend of October 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> 2008, the Community of Our Lady of Solace Parish and that of St. Therese Parish gathered at the weekend liturgies for the Ritual of Solemn Closing of their Churches. In a liturgical ceremony, all those who had found those Churches to be their spiritual home since 1926 were remembered: all those who had been Baptized, Confirmed, Married and buried were especially recognized. It was certainly a sad day and we all walked out of church that day feeling a lot like those disciples in the upper-room.... It was an experience of loss and sorrow and confusion: "*What shall we do now? Shall I go to that new parish? Shall I go to another church? Shall I stop going altogether?*" But: out of the ashes and pain of that experience, we all gathered the next weekend: on the Feast of All Saints, to birth a new parish community, blessed and enriched by the multiple gifts and traditions of the two former communities; and, since then: of St. Andrews Community and, of sisters and brothers from many other areas. As Pastor, I'm so thankful for you who – in the midst of it all – have worked so hard, sharing your many gifts of time, talent and treasure, as St. Paul writes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: 'to make us with our many parts – one body...'

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As we know, every parish has its own particular charism, or gift of The Spirit, and as we have grown in these 5 ½ years, it seems that The Spirit is calling us – over and over – to be a community where:

- 1) All Are Welcome! Here at all Saints there are no insiders and outsiders; every person who becomes a member of our Parish enriches our community and helps us become more and more the Body of Christ on Syracuse's South East side.
- 2) The Spirit is calling and gifting us to be a diverse parish! As one of a number of examples: Last Sunday, 21 of our children - representing *eleven different countries of origin*, made their 1<sup>st</sup> Communion! What a beautiful rainbow and how rich the Parish is with all the diversity of the rainbow!
- 3) The Spirit is calling and gifting us to be a community of involvement both locally and globally, joining with others in reaching out to the poor, the powerless and the oppressed: we minister at Parkside Commons; North Side Ministries; Oxford Inn; Villanueva, Nicaragua; Karare, Kenya; *Break Margins Africa*; with the *Starfish Girls* in the Gambia; the Nottingham; through our Women's Task Force, LGBT Task Force, and Disabilities Task Force and the list goes on... Just this weekend parishioners from our parish joined with *Faithful Catholics Concerned* and others from around the Diocese, in challenging our Church to expand the role of women within our Church as a means to confront systems of global injustice and oppression of women and children. Brothers and sisters, to the extent that we have the courage and grace to do this in the midst of our own weakness, we will be blessed; and, yes, we may suffer a bit too...
- 4) Sisters and brothers, The Spirit is calling us to be a community that takes risks for the sake of the Gospel! Last fall, we as a Parish Community, together took the risk of purchasing the Bishop Harrison Center to serve the needs not only of our Parish, but also the greater community. Because of the generosity of our former Communities, we are presently renovating the Center to serve a multitude of possibilities. Already, The Spiritual Renewal Center has moved-in, enriching the Parish and wider-community with amazing opportunities for spiritual growth. By September, we hope to be ready for The Friends of Dorothy, a loving home for the dying, to hold their monthly fund-raising dinners here, and that's just the beginning...! (We'll share updates on the renovations in the near future.)

Looking ahead: Our Parish is blessed to be in a neighborhood surrounded by Syracuse and Upstate Medical Universities, the NY State University of Environmental Science and Forestry, and LeMoyne College. Our long-term future calls us toward opportunities for developing ministry, service and support with these communities.

On this Pentecost Sunday, let us recognize with thanksgiving The Spirit here: within us and among us and pray that our hearts *be open* to where The Spirit may be leading us, and pray that the doors of our hearts may *remain open* to where The Spirit is leading us. In conclusion, let us stand and together, prayerfully reflect on our Parish Mission Statement.

*In the spirit of Vatican II,  
All Saints parish is an open and welcoming  
Catholic Christian community,  
joyfully grounded in the Eucharist,  
that strives to live the Gospel call to holiness  
and loving service to all.*

Amen!