

## Pentecost Sunday (06/12/11)

Pentecost celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit on the church to strengthen and empower all members to witness to the Risen Christ in the world. We receive the Holy Spirit sacramentally in Baptism and Confirmation. Both sacraments are related to becoming members of Christ's body on earth, the church, and carrying out the responsibilities of mature disciples. Having received the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation, the Holy Spirit is always available to us through our ongoing incorporation of ourselves into the Body of Christ. Remember, we have mentioned in the past that God's grace is not magic, it doesn't come to us without our willingness to grow in holiness by moving away from sin and its effects in our lives. It is an ongoing struggle to lessen sin in our lives and allow the healing light of Jesus flow through us to be shared with others. In the daily battle of good vs evil, we need to consciously ask for the Holy Spirit to help us discern good from evil (in all its attractive appearances) and to resist the temptations of sin.

On this birthday of the Church let us celebrate our rebirth in the risen and ascended Lord Jesus and rededicate our lives to serving our Lord. Here at the Eucharist we are nurtured by Christ so that we can be transformed little by little into the light of Christ for the world. May the Holy Spirit guide us to the life of Christ starting here and now! Ascension Of Our Lord (06/05/11) At the Last Supper Jesus comforts his disciples when He tells them that He will leave them soon, but that He will send the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen them to be His witnesses in the world. His first leaving was through His death, but His second leaving was the return to the Father in the Ascension. Jesus reminds them that His return to the Father is something good because then He can ask the Father and They (Father and Son) will send the Holy Spirit to the disciples (us). One of the main purposes of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples was to renew their faith which had been shaken by His crucifixion. Before He sends the Holy Spirit He wishes to personally reassure them, in His human form, though it is now a glorified humanity. He reminds them that it was necessary that He suffer and die for the forgiveness of sins. Once they have regained their faith, He instructs them further in their future mission to the world. Jesus takes these ordinary, not-very-educated men and women and commissions them to be His witnesses to the whole world.

This same saving work of the Church continues today in our witness to the world. Jesus needs every one of us to witness to His truth and to proclaim repentance for our sins through Jesus. Jesus is the One and Only Savior of the world. "No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). It is our vocation to live a life of faith in Jesus' redemptive work for us and to share that faith with our neighbors, many of whom have been deceived by Satan into believing that all faiths are equal and that there are many different paths to God. But we know for certain that only Jesus is "...the way and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). Let us proclaim with our lives our total faith in Jesus Christ!

## The Sixth Sunday of Easter (05/29/11)

As we get closer to the celebration of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the church, we are drawn more deeply into the mystery of Christ's indwelling with us. Jesus tells his disciples and us that if we love him, we will keep his commandments. He goes on to say that when we obey his

commandments and love one another, He is in us. This is the mystery of our divinization, our being lifted up before God. When we live in the awareness of the Spirit of God dwelling within us, we become more divine. That is, we become more like Christ. Every time we come to the Eucharistic table we receive the body and blood of the risen Lord Jesus himself, and this allows us to live in Christ and Christ to live in us. Jesus gives us this gift so we can be his witnesses in the world. That means that the world learns about God's love by the way we live. Let us then truly live and grow in the awareness of our intimacy with the living Christ and draw the world to God through our lives lived in the Spirit. The Fifth Sunday of Easter (05/22/11) At the beginning of Acts (3:42-47) we hear of the community of believers living in wonderful harmony.

Today's reading (6:1-7) brings us back to earth with some dissension in the community, caused by tension amid the diversity (Gentiles and Hebrews) of the growing community of faith. We see how Peter and the Apostles resolve this situation by appointing new ministers (deacons) recommended by the community to take care of the poor while they concentrate on the proclamation of the Word. The Church is growing. The gospel comes at the Last Supper. Jesus is trying to reassure his apostles after He told them he was going to leave them. He promises them that He is going away in order to prepare a place for them in His Father's house, and then will come back to take them to Himself. This can have a double meaning, first in that Jesus will come back after the Resurrection to take them to Himself through the giving of the Holy Spirit; and/or second, in that Jesus will prepare a place in heaven for his followers after their death. Both meanings give hope to His disciples.

Jesus also reasserts that He is the Way to the Father, following up on last week's gospel when He tells the Pharisees He is the Good Shepherd and the gate. Jesus speaks this in the Wisdom tradition where there are only two ways, the way of the wise in following God's precepts and the way of the foolish in following anything else before God. Jesus is the only way to the Father and He invites all people to hear His voice and follow Him in obedience to eternal life. May this Easter season open our minds and hearts more to the fullness of Love Christ wishes to offer us through our own cross and resurrection. Alleluia!

The Fourth Sunday of Easter (05/15/11)

There is no other religion in the world that claims that its human founder is God except Christianity. That's what makes Christianity unique. Although our faith accepts that claim, logically speaking the claim is either true or false. If it is false, then individuals may do with their lives as they wish. But if it is true, then every single person on the face of the earth is affected by our faith. Because if it is true, then every other claim of religion is either false or a deviation from the true faith. That is why we speak of our faith as the "true faith." Not that we are responsible for it being true, for our faith is a gift from God. But we have an awesome responsibility to help the world and our neighbors see that Christianity, and especially Catholic Christianity, is the Only "true faith" in the world.

Jesus had a difficult time convincing the Jewish religious establishment that He was the culmination of everything God had promised His people. We Catholics have a difficult time convincing other faiths, even Christians, that the Catholic Church is the ONE church Jesus founded. This does not mean that there are no sinners in the church, either leaders or followers, shepherds or sheep. But it does mean

that no other faith can claim to fulfill the will of Christ "that they may all be one." (John 17:21). All disciples have a responsibility to pray for church leaders so that they will conform to Christ's will and be faithful leaders. The church is always in need of reform, both leaders and laity. But this reform must always come from within, without sacrificing the unity of the Body of Christ, even if it takes longer.

Jesus is the only savior of the world, even if followers of other faiths don't know it or accept it. The Truth simply IS. As Catholics we are called to love our neighbors, and therefore we have the primary duty to Christ to spread our faith in love. We always respect wherever others are on their faith journey, but we also must help them see that Jesus is the gate through whom all must enter. And while we pray for others, we must also pray that we ourselves be faithful so that we do not lose the gift of our faith by neglect. Jesus calls us to conform to His teaching. In return, He offers us His abundant life..."I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." Amen!

The Third Sunday of Easter (05/08/11)

The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus meeting with Jesus sets the stage for the early church's proclamation that Jesus is with them in the "breaking of the bread." It's entirely possible that the two disciples were giving up on their discipleship by returning to their homes. Yet they were still willing to talk about their dashed hopes with a stranger as they were leaving. Jesus met them in their disappointment and helped restore their faith for the difficult and uncertain journey of discipleship. Their journey is much like ours. We do not fully comprehend what God is doing with our lives, yet we have faith to stay on the journey, sometimes hesitatingly. The Eucharist can become the source of new life and hope for us when we are discouraged.

In the "breaking of the bread" the early followers of Jesus learned to trust that Jesus would always be with them and nourish them for their journey just as God had fed His people for forty years in the desert. If we remember in the Eucharist that it is Jesus Himself that is walking with us, no matter how difficult life gets we will be able to persevere. Through our perseverance in faith, we will come to an even deeper relationship with the Risen Lord and share His Joy. Alleluia!

The Second Sunday of Easter (05/01/11)

Happy Easter! Again! Liturgically, every day in the octave (8 days) of Easter is celebrated as Easter itself. The octave ends today, Divine Mercy Sunday. Pope John Paul II designated the Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday to remind us of the great mercy of Jesus in offering His body and blood for the salvation of the world. But there are many people who act as if God's mercy is not necessary in their lives. Today we especially pray for all souls who have turned away from God, that they may open their hearts to God's infinite mercy. Salvation is only possible for those who turn back to God and ask for mercy.

Today as we truly celebrate with joy the unbelievable love of our Lord for us, let us also be mindful of those in need of God's mercy. We have grown in awareness of the physical hunger of people in the world who go without, but the tragedy of those who live in spiritual hunger is much, much greater. Our brothers and sisters need our prayers to help them turn to God. In this time of Easter joy, let us pray

that the joy of the risen Lord Jesus may fill our hearts and the hearts of all God's people. May God continue to bless us with Easter joy and peace. Alleluia!

Easter Sunday (04/24/11)

Happy Easter! This is the greatest day of the year because we celebrate the Lord's resurrection and triumph over death and sin. Through the power of Christ's death and resurrection we are saved from the consequences of sin, which is spiritual death. Sin cuts us off from God, Grace restores us to God. Easter is the ultimate revelation of God's love in making our salvation possible. As sinful humans, we could not make up for the offense against God by humanity. Only a God-Man could accomplish this, and only if He were perfectly obedient to the Father's will by suffering and dying for us out of Love. This past Holy Week we have been remembering how much Jesus did for us. Now we remember the Grace He won for us. All we have to do is turn away from sin and accept it!

We celebrate Easter every day during the Octave of Easter, which is why no other church celebrations occur during this week. And during this week, actually beginning on Good Friday, we are encouraged to pray the novena of Divine Mercy. Pope John Paul II recommended this devotion in 2000 when he named the Sunday after Easter Divine Mercy Sunday. As we celebrate the Lord's love for us in the Resurrection, let us also take the time to pray for those whose souls are most in need of God's mercy. As we have mentioned before, one of the great mysteries is that God often chooses to restrict His mercy to the extent that we, both individually and collectively as the Body of Christ on earth, cooperate with it. God relies on our prayers to help save each other. The trust He has in us is truly unbelievable! We wish you a blessed and holy Easter Season as we grow in our love of neighbor through our prayers. Amen!