

Greetings!

It is hard to think that Summer is a little more than half-way through. It seems that as time goes on it accelerates and before we know it we are unaware of where the time has gone. The age old saying of the older you get the quicker time goes by seems truer than ever. Speaking of getting older I wanted to say a heart-felt 'thank you' for all the birthday wishes. I am very blessed to have been able to spend my birthday here in the parish at V.B.S. - which was a great program this year, by the way!

In light of today's readings, I was reminded of my trip with Fr. Von to Franciscan University this Summer for the '*Priest, Deacon, Seminarian Retreat*'. On that retreat, I had a rediscovery of the incredible gifts of Baptism and Confirmation, through which we receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Person of Love is given as a gift! A gift is not a gift if the donor does not intend for the recipient to possess what is given. Therefore, God gives us Himself to us in order that we may possess Him in a supernatural relationship of love.

However, the Gift who has been poured into our hearts also prepares us to receive Him, and for us to be conformed to Jesus so much so that as we progress in intimacy with God we become more and more a true image of Jesus. The more we are like Jesus the holier we are. Holiness and being transformed into Christ are directly related. How are we prepared and conformed to Jesus? By the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit! How many of us zealously pray for the actualization or the coming to fruition of the gifts that have been planted in us at Baptism and sealed at Confirmation? Or do we think it is a one-shot deal? Like any relationship there has to be reciprocity. We must ask and desire and pray that the particular gifts and talents that God has freely bestowed on us come to bear in us. Some have been given us because they are directly related to our going to Heaven because they help to perfect us. Others are given to us for the express purpose of building up the Kingdom of God (The Church for example): to share them so others may become holy. God is only going to take us as deep into relationship with Him as we are willing to go. Granted 'where' He wants us to be is incomprehensibly more intimate and profound and ecstatic and happy and loving than we could fathom here, but He will not force us - Love admits no coercion. The reality of this incredible fact can be evidenced by the gifts and charisms from the Holy Spirit: prophecy (mindful that there is no new public revelation - Public Revelation closed with the death of the last apostle), words of knowledge, praying in tongues - or speaking multiple languages at once - interpretation of tongues, discernment, healing, teaching, administration, preaching, etc., These gifts also serve to corroborate the Gospel and the Teachings of the Church. St. Paul even encourages the Church in Corinth zealously to pray for the gifts of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 14:1).

Which is why I was reminded of Franciscan: I hadn't really ever prayed (on a regular basis) for the actualization of the gifts of my Baptism and Confirmation until I had gone there, and at the conference this very topic came up. I am very thankful for having been.

God is just as powerful now as back when Jesus, the Apostles and other members of the early Church healed and prophesied and delivered people. To think that He doesn't do that anymore or can't is a bit foolish. It's interesting to note what Jesus said to the Apostles at the Ascension in the Gospel of Mark. What He said was taken very seriously for the first couple hundred years of the Church by the Faithful. During that time catechumens were prepared and told that after Baptism and Confirmation they have the gifts of the Spirit. Miracles were a common occurrence. To reiterate, this wasn't and isn't for showboating, but rather for the glory of God and stirring up of the faith of the faithful. These occurrences still happen today!

My point is this: how often do we marvel at what's been given us in Baptism and Confirmation and moreover, do we ask with faith and expectation for those gifts and fruits to grow in us? Do we try to go deeper in our understanding of these Sacraments of initiation and what they do in us and to us, or do we stay at the same level at which were at when we had CCD however many years ago?

Your servant in Christ, Seminarian Joe