

05/15/16 Pentecost C

-- This weekend, there are 11 possible readings you could hear in a Catholic Church: six possible for the Vigil on Saturday, five possible on Sunday. Yet you will only hear three of these eleven at any one Mass.

-- Having read through them, what do I think holds them together, other than the general theme of the Holy Spirit? I think the glue is how there is much fear in the world, but the gift of the Holy Spirit gives us courage and helps us overcome fear.

-- Our 8th graders, in preparing for Confirmation, learned that courage (or fortitude, as we called it) is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. And though it's a bit dangerous to pick out one gift as most important, a good case can be made for courage as a critical gift.

-- Just look at our world today. So much of what we see and hear is driven by fear. Politicians play to people's fears and promise that they are the solution. Some 55 years ago a wall was built in Berlin because of fear. That was torn down, but several years ago a wall was built in Israel and the West Bank out of fear. And some people in our country want to build more walls.

-- Very early on, the tower of Babel (first reading, vigil) was built out of fear as well, fear of becoming insignificant and unneeded.

-- People are afraid of lots of things in ordinary life. Many fear they may suddenly lose their jobs. There is a lot of fear today over the spread of prescription drug and even heroin addiction. And you can add more examples. Some are exaggerated, but some are very real.

-- The disciples of Jesus had fears. Even after his resurrection and appearing to them, they were fearful and kept to themselves. But God had other things in mind for them, just as he has for us. Pentecost proved that.

-- But, as St. Paul reminds us, we have received a spirit of adoption. That means we are chosen by God, accepted and loved for who we are. And God did not limit that gift of adoption to a particular people.

-- The Holy Spirit reminds us that we do not have to give into fear precisely because we are God's children. The disciples of Jesus recognized that on Pentecost and it changed their lives and those of countless others.

-- The gift of the Holy Spirit often works over time. St. Paul compared it in the 2nd reading of the vigil Mass to a woman in labor. It often takes time for the work of the Holy Spirit to be accomplished. But God is with us in that process, no matter how long it takes.

-- This is a timely message, particularly as we (will) honor our graduates this weekend. They are going out to face new situations in life, to take on more adult responsibilities, and that can raise fears.

-- Their faith will be challenged by other people as they enter college campuses, the military or work situations, as many of us have experienced in our own lives.

-- The Holy Spirit walks with them and with us in facing those challenges. The Holy Spirit calls us to overcome our fear, especially when that fear is real and understandable.

-- The apostles and those who followed them could not have done what they did without the power of the Holy Spirit. That power touches each of us. It may not lead us to foreign lands, but it may well help us deal with foreign ideas that get shoved at us.

-- It may not lead us to speak in new languages, but it may well help us to understand better people around us who think differently and help us find common ground.

-- Yes, the power of the Holy Spirit is real. It is real because God has conquered sin and death. So we do not need to be prisoners to fear.