

We’ve all seen, or experienced, the sight of small children running wonder-eyed to the brightly wrapped packages arrayed under the Christmas tree. Eagerly they rip the wrapping paper away, tear open the box, and holding the gift proclaim: “Look what I got!” or perhaps, “It’s just what I wanted!” Gifts stir wonder and excitement. Gifts also engender response. Pentecost is gift—God’s gift of himself to us in the Holy Spirit first received at our baptism, sealed as we were anointed with Holy Chrism in confirmation, and renewed in each participation of the Holy Eucharist here at Mass.

In today’s Gospel Jesus speaks about the gift of the Holy Spirit he bestows as well as the Spirit’s effects produced in those who receive it. “When the Advocate comes...he will testify to me. And you also testify because you have been with me from the beginning. ...He will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own. ...He will speak what he hears and will declare to you the things that are coming.” (Jn. 15:26-27, 16:12-15.)

St. Paul in the second reading reminds us that God’s gift of the Holy Spirit is “tailor made”, “customized” for each of us: “To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.” (I Cor. 12:7) It is important to note that the context out of which St. Paul wrote was a community experiencing great divisions—people selfishly hoarding and arguing about their spiritual gifts, as well as lording it over others who did not possess the same gifts they possessed, or, other gifts. St. Paul gives them, and us, necessary correction. While the particular gift (or gifts) we have been given by the Holy Spirit is uniquely fitted to us, it (or they) is not primarily or solely for private use but is given to be shared with the gifts of others for the sake of the mission of the church. To the extent that we hoard our gift (or gifts) of the Spirit, ignore it, let it lie fallow, let it “rust out”, the mission of spreading the Gospel in the world entrusted to us by Jesus, through the world-wide church, and here in St. Cecilia’s parish is weakened.

The Scriptures speak of God’s gifts to us and the corresponding responsibility to put them to good use as stewardship. This Bishops of our country in their pastoral letter,

“Stewardship: A Disciples Response” state: “The authentic disciple regards all he or she possesses as gifts and blessings with others for the sake of the kingdom of God.” While we are the recipients of God’s Holy Spirit and through him our particular gifts, we dare not forget that they come from and will one day we will have to give account to God for their use. The bishops go on to state: “Stewardship...means helping the Church’s mission with money, time, and personal resources of all kinds. This sharing is not an option for Catholics who understand what membership in the Church involves. It is a serious duty. It is a consequence of the faith which Catholics profess and celebrate. ...Stewardship is part of discipleship. ...Christian discipleship begins with vocation, the call to follow Jesus and imitate his way of life. ...Who is a Christian disciple? One who responds to Christ’s call, follows Jesus, and shapes his or her life in imitation of Christ’s. Who is a Christian steward? One who receives God’s gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord.” (Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, Introduction and Chapter 1.)

This Pentecost I invite all of us to a personal “gift inventory.” Take a pen and paper or your electronic device and after a few moments of prayer list those gifts/talents God has revealed to you as your gifts. Don’t be shy and don’t say “I don’t have any.” We all have been given gifts! Then ask: “To what use am I putting my gifts—at home, work, in the life of St. Cecilia Parish, the wider community, the world?” Am I hoarding them? Letting them “rust out”? When asked to share my gifts with family, colleagues, the life of the parish, what response do I give and why?

Once again quoting from the Bishops pastoral: “We pray that the Holy Spirit, whose gracious action conforms us to Jesus Christ and to the Church, will enlighten us all and help us to renew our commitment as the Lord’s disciples and as stewards of his bountiful gifts.”

Enjoy opening your Pentecost gifts!

Fr Jim Secora