

## *From Your Pastor*

### *Happy Pentecost! ~ The Holy Spirit, Forgiveness, and Sin*

The Easter Season began at the great Easter Vigil when the darkness of night was pierced with light from the Easter fire. From that fire our Paschal Candle, a visible reminder of the presence of Christ among us, was lighted and given a special place in the church. This great season of Easter – in which the Church was born – celebrates the principal gifts of the saving passion, death and resurrection of the Lord, namely the forgiveness of our sins and our reconciliation with God and with one another. The Easter Season concludes today with the celebration of the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost or “the fiftieth (day).” Beautifully, just as the Easter Season began in forgiveness, it ends in forgiveness. As was proclaimed in the Gospel today, Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins are retained are retained” (Jn 20:23).

We will never have a right attitude toward forgiveness if we are not honest about sin. I offer two brief thoughts about sin. The first is this. The fact that mercy and forgiveness are always available from God – and should always be available from our neighbor – does not give us a license to sin. What do I mean by this? Sometimes in life we develop the attitude that it is easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to obtain permission. This happens, for example, when my spouse or friend rightly has high expectations of my behavior, but is unfailing in his or her love even when I do something wrong. Because he or she expects me to live virtuously, I know I cannot ask permission to do something wrong. Yet, knowing that I will be forgiven, I give myself the permission or the license to do wrong.

This license to sin, which I choose because of the goodness and the love of my spouse or my friend, is a very serious violation of the love that I receive from him or her. In the end, it is a violation of our friendship and will lead to the destruction of our relationship. Why? Because when I sin in this way, I do not truly receive the love of my spouse or friend as the pure gift that it is, but rather I use it as part of the motivation for my sin. I rely on the love and the forgiveness that I know I will receive in order to give myself the license to live falsely in my relationship with another and to commit sin. In

the end, what I want from the other is not his or her love, but the license I need to live in my own egoism. When I live like this, there is really no relationship of love at all. I forfeit love for my own selfish wants.

The second thought about sin is this. When I sin against God and my neighbor, I always sin against myself. God is love. He created me in love and in his image. Every time that I sin, I choose to live outside of God’s love and, therefore, I become less of his image. Sin really is a self-destructive act, because it is always an act that makes me less of who I am. When I choose to persist in sin, I am really choosing the death of my relationships with God and with my neighbor. I am choosing to live without love and will find myself completely alone. Sadly, this was the experience of Judas. In the end, he found himself completely separated from the Lord, because he chose not to accept the Lord’s love.

The person who honestly recognizes his sin and admits it is the person who knows what it means to have a broken heart. His heart is truly sorry and filled with repentance for what he has done. He runs to the Lord for forgiveness with a contrite heart, because he cannot live with what he has done to God or to his neighbor. Neither can he live with what he has done to himself. This was the experience of Saint Peter. Once he realized what he had done in denying the Lord, he knew he needed forgiveness. With a contrite heart he asked for it and he received it.

Very often we forget the deadly effect that sin has upon us. God does not. From the moment God created us, he has reached out to us – again and again – in complete love, to rescue us from the sin which we have embraced. In the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, his beloved Son, God showed the depth of his love for us: he reconciled us completely and for all time. Let us embrace God’s love anew as our own. Let us ask the Lord to fill us with contrite hearts that yearn to live again in God’s image. By his grace, let us be truly reconciled with him, and truly committed to forgiving one another and to reconciling with one another. This is the life of the Holy Spirit that Jesus breathed into his disciples. May the Holy Spirit renew that life within us.



God bless each of you.

*Mrs. Fay*