

Today we celebrate the Gift of the Spirit, which is **to celebrate the whole of Christian life**, for it is **“in the unity of the Holy Spirit”** that we share in the life, the love, the self-offering of the Son to the Father, and thus it is through the Spirit that we, though many, are **bound together in God through the one Mystical Body** of the Son, able to find our identities as extensions of his unimaginably wonderful presence and work in the world, and of his communion with the Father. The Spirit is **the gift that brings the life and work of God to each of us personally**. With gratitude, **let us relish that gift now, and seek to open ourselves** to it more. Bishop Burns issued this Pentecost a wonderful pastoral letter – his third post-synodal letter – calling all of us **to embrace this time of renewal and rekindling of missionary zeal**. *“Our Diocese is taking steps to address the needs surfaced through the synod. Yet real renewal demands more than policies—it requires transformation of hearts.”* This means getting engaged and not letting the Spirit’s gifts lie dormant. **It means trusting in God**, even when times are difficult: *“Like the Apostles, who were filled with joy even amidst uncertainty, we are invited to place our trust in the Lord—to rely more deeply on His providence to animate our lives with love and mercy.”*

So, let us contemplate this life in the Spirit. Mass today (and every day) should feel like a **locker room at halftime**, when we’re down but not out – regrouping to examine ourselves and summon our strength to come out the doors with zeal. **So, what are the signs** of life in the Spirit? How can we open ourselves to it? Jesus compares the Spirit to the wind: **“The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”** (Jn 3:8). This means we will **see the effects of the Spirit – the sound he makes**. And that his effects will be recognized in part by their mysterious origin and direction. Like a wind, he will rush upon us and move us. We will be carried forward by him if we open our sails and allow ourselves to be moved by a power beyond our control. Only then will we know him, as we see his invisible shape and sense his power as he “fills out” our sails/lives and move us.

1. Be ready to be unique, to be gifted for a particular service of the Gospel.

In the first reading, **the apostles were each given a special fire**, and the Spirit enabled each of them to speak in special tongues. In the second reading, the Spirit visits all “the baptized,” all the members of the Body of Christ, with a “manifestation” of his presence and power, some **special gift given to each “individual” for the sake of benefiting that individual member and the whole body**. These gifts are for the sake of the life of the Body, which is to say her mission and happiness in the world: to proclaim the love of God made known to us through the death and resurrection of his Son, and **not only to proclaim but to communicate the very reality of that life and love by extending the reach of the sacraments and nourishing faith, hope and love** in everyone who listens. In the gospel today, **Jesus sends the apostles just as he has been sent from the Father**. Wherever we go, let it be for the same purpose: so that we might **communicate the abundant life we have received through Jesus from the Father**.

2. Be ready to be defined by the spiritual freedom of true love for God.

The apostles went about the world for love's sake **ready even to lose their lives – so long as they could preach Christ crucified**. They and their disciples become men and women **defined by love, by a passion enkindled by God and burning in each of their hearts**. They didn't worry about **failure**, as they could measure it on their own. They were **ready to shake the dust from their feet and move forward**. They had the **freedom of children, because they are “led by the Spirit of God”** and thus call upon God as Abba, Father (Rm 8:15). They **didn't worry about their poverty: Peter and John were not insecure when they had “neither silver nor gold”** for the crippled beggar; they were confident to give just what God had given them power to give: the saving name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6-8). And Paul was confident to preach the Gospel God charged him to preach, and he **did not let his ineloquence stop him or leave him feeling insecure in his mission** (2 Cor 11:5-6). The apostles – like all who live in the Spirit – did not pay much attention to their inadequacies. **Their only desire was to move forward in obedience to God – to live as men ‘impelled’ by the love of Christ, and so to seek the unification of the world in Christ** (2 Cor 5:14-20).ⁱ St. Paul says God has “given us the ministry of reconciliation” as he is “reconciling the world to himself in Christ”. **They burned with a passion to be reconciled**. To reconcile is to restore unity – and especially the unity of relationships, *reconcile* etymologically suggests restoring eye contact (*concilium* = meeting; *cilium* = eyelid). This is what Christ does **after the resurrection, when the apostles, cast down by shame, are invited to lift their gaze back to their friend, whom they had betrayed, and to return to communion and thereby to allow their pasts, with all their failures, to be redefined as a story of persevering love. Love liberates, restores and unifies**. It is not afraid, ashamed or anxiously self-regarding. It is constantly encouraging everyone to journey to God.

3. Be ready to be motivated by *daring* love, and not merely by predictable law.

This experience of God's love **provoked the apostles to return love**. As St. John says, “**We love because he first loved us**” (1 Jn 4:19). The disciples were men and women of passion. **But we, today, often seem especially afraid of passion. If there's one thing that frightens us, it is anything “extreme” – we want to live algorithmically, where everything is predictable, controllable and justifiable**. Where we can never be criticized, because everything we do can be explained according to the same principles that everyone else accepts. **Religiously, this looks like the elder brother in the story of the Prodigal son: he kept the law as a way of justifying himself and laying claim on what he wanted, i.e., a pleasing self-image**. Those who love will keep the law, *but because they are in love*. They have a spirit of adoption, **not a spirit of slavery** (Rm 8:14-17). They always look at our beautiful God, rather than at how they “measure up” to themselves or others. If you are **moved by the Spirit, you will do good things because they are good**, and you will reject the temptation to cash out and think that you are now *owed* something. **You will not be bothered if you are overlooked**, or if others don't affirm your good deeds. **You will just be happy “always” to be in the Father's house**, where everything he has “is yours” (Lk 15:31). You will put to death the deeds of the flesh (Rm 8:1-13) – egoism, self-indulgence and everything that cuts us off from communion with God – because you just love being his child, because you love having his Spirit in you.

4. Be ready to be misunderstood.

The man truly in love is not calculating, and so he will easily look ridiculous to the world. Just a few verses after our excerpt in the first reading, the apostles are mocked as it is **suggested their experience of the Spirit was simply drunkenness** (Acts 2:13). He sings and sees things that no one else does. **The person in love will indeed sometimes look odd to others.** Indeed, we cannot totally “explain” the love of one spouse for the other. Nor can anyone defend beyond all allegedly “reasonable doubt” the insight that leads someone to identify his vocation, whether to marriage or to union with Christ in religious life. If we want to move forward in life, we must indeed proceed with reason – but a reason that tries to domesticate the Spirit or reduce everything to categories that apply to us all equally will close us to the Spirit. We must be ready to step out in strange ways, in ways that the world cannot understand, in ways that only the saints can recognize. As Jesus says, “**The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.**” (Jn 3:8)

5. Be ready even to suffer.

The person in love can sometimes suffer scorn. So long as his movements don’t demand anything from anyone, people are content just to laugh at him and label him as an oddball doing his oddball thing. But **sometimes the person in love will irk us. Because his love might suggest there is something out there that is worthy of our passion,** and that we might be at fault for failing to understand him, and to love like him. He shows that the acedia of our world is not inevitable, and **that we might be missing the boat on the real excitement of life.**ⁱⁱ The person in love is often unpredictable and uncontrollable, and cynically we might reject him because he threatens to disturb the status quo that allows us to live out our private schemes.

We need men and women today who are enflamed by the love of God, who have had a true spiritual experience and allow themselves to live from it. People who believe in God, who truly pray and reach conviction about his presence in their lives. What marks such people? **They don’t let fear push them to quench the Spirit and embrace conformity at the cost of obeying God.** But, in addition, **they also do not let fear of suffering or being misunderstood lead them to the pride or holier-than-thou attitude that would isolate them from the Body,** either by **sullenly withdrawing from the community** and refusing to share themselves, **or by haughtily imposing themselves on the community and demanding it bend to their will.** They are not like the elder brother trying to justify himself. They just want to dwell with the Father. **They remember that gifts are individual, but that they are for the benefit of the Body, and to be deployed at the time and place determined by the Spirit and not by the member.** So, they are **both impelled and patient.** Thus, “wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle” (James 3:17). Those moved by the Spirit **know that real love is a labor, and so they do not retreat into the echo chamber of self-affirming daydreams and screeds.** Moreover, they know that the love of God they have experienced is a reconciling love, and that **they too are on the path of reconciliation – and thus they are ready to examine themselves, to listen to God speaking through others,** to distinguish between what is a true gift of God and what, on the other hand, is an idiosyncratic tick to be purified.

6. Be ready to generate life, and to accept responsibility for it.

Men and women in love can be challenging. They are God's ambassadors calling us higher. But they are also deeply attractive, if we can humble ourselves to see what they see.

Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* ends with a suggestion that the wickedness manifested in the main character threatens us all, that the existential listlessness that left him vulnerable to depravity looms before us. **He says we "have long ceased to be born of living fathers" (130): that is, we have ceased to emerge from communities that generate truly human life by inculcating true love for what is higher, for what is worthy of self-sacrifice, of giving our lives away and thus bestowing meaning and purpose upon it.**

We are satisfied with contrived affectivity, with control, rather than the humility of truly falling in love with what is greater than ourselves, with letting ourselves look as fools for love's sake, so long as we can pursue the beloved. As Dostoyevsky says, *"Leave us to ourselves, without a book, and we'll immediately get confused, lost – we won't know what to join, what to hold to, what to love and what to hate, what to respect and what to despise."* (130) We value social convention, cognitive biases and manufactured convictions (mainstream thinking) more than truth, courage and wisdom. **Because we are afraid to love like a man ready to die for his ideals, or like a mother ready to give birth** – and thus to experience real pain and real joy – our emotional states are as flat and predictable as Hallmark cards. We are striving "to be born somehow from an idea" (130), to become the product of total planning – and of *our own* idea!

But we need to be born from passion, from real spiritual fathers and mothers. We need the **Holy Spirit, "the Lord, the Giver of life"** (Nicene Creed). This insight came to me when I was learning more about the **21 Coptic martyrs**, who were killed by ISIS on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in Libya in 2015, and whose feast day is February 15. ISIS recorded their execution in **a propaganda video that backfired** in the most marvelous way. **ISIS thought human beings were predictable and controllable.** They thought the symbols of fear and self-protection could give them the code to program Christians throughout the world. **But they were wrong, because these 21 Christians were in love.** They had the Lord of Life dwelling within them. In the video, they are courageous and peaceful. You can see them **mouthed prayers**. There is [one man](#) who is obviously not from Egypt. He is from Ghana, and the report is that when ISIS wanted to let him go because he was not a Christian (they had all been kidnapped together, but ISIS was trying to scare "people of the cross" and so wanted to execute Christians), he **insisted he stay** with the others, declaring, "Their God is my God." These men knew who they were, and they had the **strength to be consistent with who they were** come what may – [Even Unto Death](#). Moreover, **their families too knew who they were, and they rejoiced** over the fidelity of their sons, fathers and brothers; they rejoiced to know that they have veritable saints in their families. They had **no desire for revenge**. They were **peaceful, proud and calm**. Such people are like the apostles at Pentecost – they seem drunk, crazy, impossible to make sense of. But they are simply filled with the Spirit: in love with God and ready to get on the move; ready to trust God and give their entire lives away for the reconciliation of the world. They are not sullen, fearful or bitter. They are joyful, prayerful, ready for anything – and on the move.