

Gospel John 14:15-21

May 21, 2017

Homilist: Deacon Mike Mocek

Most of us, I am certain, have experienced enough loss or change in our lives that we can sense, at least in some small way, the anxiety that the Apostles in today's Gospel must have felt as they listened to Jesus give his farewell at the Last Supper. It may seem farfetched, but this event recalls for me some of the summers of my youth. During the 1940s and 1950s several of my aunts and uncles moved their families away from our small, west Texas home town to places like Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio in search of better jobs. My parents stayed and took over the family farm. As the years rolled by, these relatives would come back and spend a week or two each summer visiting with my grandparents and others of us who had stayed behind. These summertime visits were great fun for all of us. The times we spent together were highlighted by backyard cookouts, ball games, homemade ice cream, and trips to the lake. I especially enjoyed the opportunities to show my city slicker cousins around the farm and play a few barnyard tricks on them. They retaliated, of course, whenever they hosted their country bumpkin cousin in the city. The only real downside to these summertime visits was that they inevitably came to an end. The goodbyes were difficult, but we could always look forward to next year – at least until time finally took its toll and my grandparents died, the visits waned, and we all had to let go and find new interests and new summertime activities.

The Gospel tells us that letting go was especially difficult for the Apostles. They had been following Jesus in his public ministry for some three years. He was their constant companion, their teacher,

their master, and their hope for freeing Israel from occupation by the Romans. But on their journey to Jerusalem, the Apostles began hearing from Jesus that he would not be with them much longer. Even worse, he would be persecuted and put to an agonizing death. They reacted first with disbelief, and then with fear and anxiety. In his farewell discourse at the Last Supper, Jesus seeks to calm their anxieties with news that he will not leave them orphaned, but will send an Advocate who will remain with them always. He calls this Advocate the Spirit of truth, and adds that this Spirit will not only be with them but will also be in them. Jesus often said that the Father was in him, and now he is saying that the Spirit is in each one of us. Contrary to some popular notions, the Holy Spirit is not a ghost floating around somewhere in the nether world. The Spirit is in us and is revealed to others through our actions, just as the Spirit was revealed to thousands throughout the first century in the many extraordinary events that are recorded in Acts of the Apostles.

It is important for us to remind ourselves continually of the Holy Spirit's presence within us. We need to look for the Spirit in others as we strive to reveal the Spirit to others by our actions. This weekend, we are celebrating two very special men of our parish who have dedicated their lives to revealing the Holy Spirit to us through their priestly ministries of 55 and 60 years. But the Spirit is not only present in the exceptional ones, like Father Schumacher and Father Donahugh, but also in the ordinary like you and me, and even in the marginalized – those that we encounter on street corners, in homeless shelters, and in jails. We are all called, by our baptisms, to see the Spirit in all others as well as to reveal the Spirit through our service to everyone we meet.

There is an interesting parallel between the Gospel that we just heard and the situation in our parish today. Not unlike the Apostles, many of us are feeling somewhat anxious over the announcement last weekend that our pastor will soon be leaving. Now, Father Jeff would never be so presumptuous as to tell us that he will send the Holy Spirit to be our Advocate, but in a very real sense, that is what will happen. The Spirit of truth, love, joy, and welcome that Father Jeff has revealed to us as our pastor over the past seven years will remain, and it will be up to us to continue revealing that Spirit to one another as well as to others who come into our community after he leaves. A few weeks ago, during our Lenten Series, Sister Mary Frances Serafino observed that the Spirit that Msgr. Ernest Langenhorst revealed as our first pastor seventy-five years ago is still evident in this parish. If we all do our part, I suspect that in some future parish anniversary celebration, someone else will observe that the Spirit revealed by Father Jeff Poirot will still be evident in Holy Family Parish. It is not that his ghost will be hanging around and haunting us. That would be weird – and scary. But his Spirit of truth, love, joy, and welcome will still be with us and in us. My big concern is who is going to take up his spirit of brewing?