

7th Sunday of Easter cycle B

When a priest gets reassigned, it's a lot of work. It's work packing up and sifting through everything you own, again. It's work lifting and hauling and moving the boxes after boxes after endless boxes of stuff that you had no idea you had accumulated, when you thought of yourself as so poor and detached. But there's also an energy and an excitement: new environment, new people, and most of all, new challenges, and with the new challenges come the dreams: ideas of what can be done, what potential lies in this new place, what potential perhaps has lain within oneself, gone dormant and neglected through the ease which comes from routine and familiarity. A year ago, Father Christopher Kubat took over as director of Catholic Social Services; I hope he doesn't mind my using him as an example, if he does, I have no idea who will cover my next Engaged Encounter weekend here for me. Anyway, when Father Kubat took over the reigns of Catholic Social Services, he talked about some of his plans for CSS, some of his dreams--dreams of helping the poor, of making the needed social services more accessible to them, and dreams of ugly trucks. Well, I know that he's made great strides in helping the poor, but finally, soon, his grand dream of the ugly truck contest will be realized: details will be available soon in the Southern Nebraska Register and through the parish, but I guess I owe him the plug, so, if you have a very, very ugly truck, you may enter it in the contest, for a fee, and win a prize. All proceeds go towards helping the needy through CSS. Now, I have dreamt many a dream over the course of my priesthood, and I can honestly say that my dreams have not once involved ugly trucks, or any other trucks for that matter. My dreams were of parish life—busy, city parish life. It's a life I thought I would love; I didn't imagine the half of how much I would love it. Some have been ordained dreaming of future studies, some of becoming chaplains in the armed services, some of missionary work. But in the end, each dream, each plan, each assignment comes down to one ideal: making Jesus known, and making his graces and his love and his mercy available to the world.

In the reading today from the Acts of the Apostles, we heard Luke's story of Pentecost, a story of both unity and of dispersion. Luke writes that they were all gathered in one place; filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in different tongues as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. But from the different tongues, came one understanding; each heard in his native language so that each could understand, and what they heard spoken were words of the mighty acts of God. Today, on this day of Pentecost, we come together in one place. Not just physically, either; we come together in one place liturgically with all the Catholics of the world, hearing the same prayers and readings in all different languages and styles;

how many Masses can you imagine are being celebrated this weekend, Masses for the Solemnity of Pentecost, and no two are exactly the same, even here in this parish, and yet all are essentially the same? And all of us have this common experience, but then comes the sort of dispersion as we are sent out at the end: "Go in peace, the Mass is ended." If you've been dozing, don't get up and leave just yet, I was just quoting, not dismissing anybody. But that's how we end each Mass, being sent out, and being sent out to do incredibly diverse works. Among religious, some are sent out to contemplate, others to do works of mercy; among the laity, some are sent out to raise families, some to amass wealth which will help to fund the works of the parish and of the Church universal, some are sent out to witness to a neighbor, some are sent out to hold the hand of a dying loved one, so that Christ's love might be felt; and even among us priests, some are sent out to fix broken lives, some sent out to teach, and some sent out, yes, to organize ugly truck contests. And this is a beautiful expression of our ultimate unity: come together, then be sent out to do all these different things, all of them ordered to the same end: bringing Christ, whom we have received here, out into the world, to be his hands and feet and voice. And it may not seem fair, but many people do not believe in Christ, because they don't believe in Christians; and they don't believe in Christians, because they can see when we are resisting his will for us, and they can see the divisions within a people who should be one.

On this [vigil / day] of Pentecost, we contemplate the Holy Spirit who is the great unifier of us Christians. It is the Holy Spirit who brings us together; he prompted each one of us to come here to this Mass and offer our worship to God today. He is at work in all the sacraments, and look at how he draws us together through them: the pagan ends up united to God and to the Christian community through the waters of baptism; the sinner rejoined to God and to the Church through reconciliation; man and woman become one in the sacrament of matrimony. And most of all, all of us are drawn into the mysteries of salvation as we gather around this altar: the priest dead to his former life, living now for the good of the faithful, standing in the person of Christ at the altar; all of you, gathered around as though at the foot of the cross, gazing upon this miracle of a pure sacrifice of love; the angels, watching and taking that sacrifice to the altar in heaven; the faithful departed, rejoicing that they have been saved by this sacrifice, and thanking God with us for the graces which now save us. Not only are we all over the world, we're in both heaven and earth; and yet this mystery, this mystery, brings us together. Us, here, on either side of the host; us, and the saints in heaven, on either side of the sacrifice. And the Holy Spirit, who was invoked to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, brings us together.

It is because we, as a people, are called to this unique unity that Saint Paul wrote to the Galatians about the flesh opposing the Spirit. He gives a list of sins which are, as Paul puts it, the works of the flesh; and giving in to these sins, these works of the flesh, causes disunity between us, and disunity between us and God. Think of how impurity and lust objectify other people; we can't be united with people whom we're using for our pleasure, rather than treating them as they truly are, children of God made in his image and likeness. Consider how idolatry and sorcery, putting our trust in created people and things, drives a wedge between us and our Creator; and we see in day to day living how outbursts of fury, and factions, and envy, dissensions drive us away from others; if we give in to these things, we end up isolated and lonely. But look at what happens when we give in to the fruits of the Spirit: think of how it feels to make a choice which is generous, how it feels to show kindness to others, look at how much better life is when we are patient, how much happier we are in the long run when we show self-control. It's so easy to give in to the flesh, but its so much more satisfying to give in to the Spirit. Because we are a people who need to be united, to each other and to our God; and as Christians, we need to **let** the Spirit work in us, and **invite** the Spirit to work in us; we need to give in to him more, so that we will give in to the flesh less and less and less.

It's been a year now for Father Kubat and his dream, and soon, the ugly trucks will roll, and I hope for his sake, and for the sake of all the people that he can help through this ridiculous contest that a great big huge caravan of hurt-my-eyes-they're-so-ugly trucks go rolling past, and that his dream comes true and then some. As Christians, we must never forget "the dream"; never forget the exalted life to which we've been called, here on earth but especially in heaven, never forget that the Spirit makes us one in Christ, and that our unity with him is what allows us to live forever in paradise. Never say "we can't fight the sins of the flesh," never say "we can't resist temptation," never just give in to the anger and the envy; give in to the Holy Spirit instead. We've received him already; he can and will and has brought us together here. Let him pour out his gifts, and then give in to his gifts; through us, God will pour out graces upon the world so that more may become one with us, so that more may also dream of unity on earth, and dream as well of unity with God and his angels and saints in heaven.