

**6<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER – C (May 9, 2010)**  
**Fr. Jerry Kopacek**

I want to begin with two brief announcements. First, I suspect you noticed that the iron fence has been removed—this was done after informing you of the proposal, hearing your opinions, and our parish pastoral council making the final decision after much discussion at its February meeting. The cement base and line posts will be removed at a later time. Some people have asked if they might be able to obtain sections of the fence; that information and other details will be given in the May issue of our parish newsletter that you will receive later this month—so stay tuned for those details. The other item I wanted to mention: at the entrances of the church you will find copies of this sheet; you are invited to take one. It describes the new Waterloo Catholic Faith Formation Commission that is being formed and how each of our local parishes will participate. This metro commission will replace those commissions that each parish now has on their own (formerly known as education committees). Each parish will elect a member to this new metro commission; we will do so next weekend with our other elections to pastoral council and CVCS board. This is an important step in our Waterloo parishes' continued efforts to work cooperatively in advancing the mission of the Church—I believe it to be a true sign of the Holy Spirit's continued presence and guidance of our local Church.

Speaking of the Holy Spirit: even though the feast of Pentecost is still two weeks away, we cannot help but notice the increasing presence of the Spirit in our readings today. In the first reading we hear of the first major dispute in the very early history of the Church: how to handle the gentile (i.e. non-Jewish) converts to this new Christian faith. Some said they needed to follow the Mosaic law completely while others said that was unnecessary. The apostles met to discuss and decide the issue...and did you catch what they said in their letter? “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us...”, then followed the details. They relied explicitly on the Holy Spirit to guide them to the right and proper decision. This guidance is directly related to what Jesus told the apostles at the Last Supper—he promised the Spirit would come to them after he rose from the dead, and that that Spirit would teach them everything and remind them of all Jesus told them.

For nearly 2000 years the Holy Spirit has been providing that guidance and teaching function for the Church and her leaders, especially for the bishops in union with Peter's successor, the pope. Last week I spoke about the current scandal in the Church; while we have to confront that reality, we also know the Church is so much more than human scandal and sin. The reason for that: the divine origin of the Church and that ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit. Any authentic perspective on the Church must also include the reality of her truth, beauty and goodness when her members sincerely seek and act on the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Countless examples can be offered; I wish to briefly mention three.

1) The Spirit has been of central importance in leading the Church to an ever-growing and ever-deepening understanding of the truth about God and his will and plan for us. A little later on in St. John's account of the Last Supper, Jesus said more about the Spirit's role; that, as the Spirit of truth he will guide them to all truth. That promise was given to the apostles and to their successors, the bishops, as well. We already saw an example of that guidance in the first reading. There have been many other gatherings of Church leaders in councils that relied on the Holy Spirit to help them clarify the Catholic faith on a wide variety of issues—everything from Jesus being both fully divine and fully human to the nature and power of the sacraments to the divine origin and reality of the papacy and many others besides.

We can and we ought to thank God for the Holy Spirit's work in the Church to help us know the truth about God that has been revealed and entrusted to us. That the Spirit can do so in spite of the flaws and sins of the Church in her human nature is even more awe-inspiring—is it not?

2) The Spirit is also the source of the great and bountiful beauty found within the Church, especially in her saints. No, we cannot ignore the ugliness of sin and evil that results from ignoring God's law and his call to holiness, but who could deny the beauty and shining example of the saints—those folks who truly loved God and genuinely sought to do his will? Among the numerous examples of these true heroes of our faith, let me offer St. Damien of Molokai, whose feast is [Monday]/tomorrow, May 10. He was a Belgian priest of the mid-to-late 1800's who had answered the call to do missionary work in the Hawaiian Islands. In the meantime, leprosy (Hansen's disease) had appeared in Hawaii, at the time a frightful and contagious disease. In 1865 the king ordered the quarantine of all afflicted with leprosy—they were to be taken to the island of Molokai where they would spend the rest of their lives isolated from their loved ones. In 1873 Fr. Damien volunteered to go to Molokai to provide pastoral care for those victims, and that is where he spent the last sixteen years of his life. He lived with the lepers, ate with them, prayed with and for them, and offering the sacraments and the presence of the Church to them. Eventually he contracted leprosy himself and died a few years later in 1889. Fr. Damien was beatified by Pope John Paul in 1995, and he became St. Damien this past October when Pope Benedict canonized him.

We can and we ought to thank God for the Holy Spirit's work in raising up St. Damien and so many other saints whose love for God and for neighbor as themselves demonstrated in so many ways the beauty of God and of lives dedicated to such love and service. That the Spirit does so in spite of the sins and frailties of those saints is even more awe-inspiring, is it not?

3) Finally, the Spirit is the origin of all the goodness and generosity shown in and by the Church and by all the followers of Christ. Think of all the good work done locally by groups like Habitat for Humanity, St. Vincent de Paul, the Catholic Worker House and the Hospitality House and so many others. Remember the outreach shown by this parish through our social concerns and Haiti twinning committees and all the other volunteer efforts offered by so many people. All this is done in response to the Holy Spirit's call to imitate Jesus' own love and holiness and all done within and in the name of the Church that Jesus established for us. And on a larger scale, remember that it is the Church that is always so prompt to respond (and to do so most generously) when disasters like the recent Haiti earthquake strike.

We can and we ought to thank God for the Holy Spirit's work in challenging and prompting us to reflect his goodness and sharing it with others in all the ways that happens. That the Spirit does so in spite of our own sins and weaknesses is even more awe-inspiring, is it not?

So as we draw closer to the feast of Pentecost, let us keep in mind Jesus' promise to the apostles that the Holy Spirit would teach them everything and remind them of all Jesus told them. With the apostles we are also beneficiaries of those promises. When the Spirit's guidance is not sought, when it is forgotten, ignored or disregarded, then spiritual and moral lukewarmness will set in—and sin and scandal can and will follow thereafter all too easily. But when we desire and seek the Spirit's guidance and the grace of God, then the truth and the beauty and the goodness of God shine forth radiantly through us and through the Church Jesus gave us and to which we belong. How genuinely we live our faith will determine in great measure how those around us think about the Church; it really is up to every single one of us. May we always desire to be taught and led by the Holy Spirit and to remember and live out all that Jesus tells us.