

December 2, 2018 - Baptized in the Holy Spirit!

We have just concluded the six-week course: **“The Gift: A Life in the Spirit”!** Nearly one hundred of our parishioners attended (about 60 on Tuesday nights and another 40 on Saturday mornings) and most of them were **baptized in the Spirit** at the fifth session. As a group, we could feel the presence of the **Holy Spirit**. We were blessed that Fr. Conley, Pastor at St. Mary’s Bryantown, had accepted our invitation to have his parish assist us in the implementation of this course: close to 30 of his parishioners joined us and they brought to our 100 OLHOC parishioners the **joy** and the **fire** of the **Holy Spirit**. You will recall that Fr. Conley had preached to all Sunday Masses about his own experience of the Holy Spirit and how **the Gift** course had changed his spiritual life (about 25 years after his priestly ordination).

I had great expectations for our parish when we embarked upon the **Year of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost**. So far, I have not been disappointed. During the summer, we had a great Vacation Bible School on the theme of “Surfing with the Holy Spirit”. It was followed by a seven-week course, “The Wild Goose: Discovering a Deeper Relationship with the Holy Spirit”, and many of the attendants did sign up for **the Gift** course in the fall. I was able to attend every session of **the Gift** course and could appreciate first-hand how the group dynamics helped open our hearts to the Holy Spirit: the common meal with small groups joining at individual tables, the singing of **glory** and **praise** in the church, the common watching of a 20-minute video, followed by discussion in small groups (the same as for meal fellowship), and concluding with more singing together in the church and a final prayer.

The highlight of **the Gift** was the fifth week when each of us was **baptized in the Holy Spirit!** Has anyone ever prayed over you? Have you ever felt a strong presence of the Holy Spirit? If so, can you imagine 2 or 3 people praying over you in a small group environment (seven to ten people), and being asked which gifts of the Holy Spirit you would like to be able to develop and use. At confirmation we already received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but we may have not yet been able to access them. Before being baptized in the Holy Spirit as an adult, we need to ask God what we desire the most in our Christian journey on earth.

On the eve of Pentecost 1997, Pope St. John Paul II prayed: **“Open yourselves with docility to the gifts of the Spirit! Accept gratefully and obediently the charisms which the Spirit never ceases to bestow on us!”** Let the Holy Spirit come into your heart and guide all your choices and decisions! I like the image of the door of our hearts as needing **two keys** for its opening: **one** outside the heart belongs to **God**, and the **other key** inside belongs to us individually. **God** is always ready to enter our hearts and **He** has the outside key to do so. But unless we have the **desire** to let **Him** open our hearts to the **Holy Spirit**, **He** will not force us. **He** has given us **free will!** We express our desire by opening the door to the heart with our inside key.

One significant desire to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit is to want to have our hearts cleansed of any sins, whether venial (minor sin) or mortal (grave sin). Once again, we can use the image of our hearts being filled with a large number of sins, for which we have never been to confession. The accumulation of sins makes it difficult to open the door to our heart. One of the positive effects of **the Gift** seminar is that many of the participants have chosen to go to confession before being baptized in the Holy Spirit. St John the Baptist said: **“I am baptizing with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me (Jesus) is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”.** (Matthew 3:11).

Just before ascending into heaven, Jesus made this great promise to his disciples, and all of us: **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”** (Acts 1:8). Jesus had promised that **He** will never leave us alone. His promise is that **He** will send us the **Holy Spirit**. While Jesus is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father, the **Holy Spirit** is the one who is always with us on earth. As a Spirit, we do not see **Him**, but we can feel his presence. Being **baptized in the Holy Spirit**, as an adult, is in a way to be born again as we are opening our hearts to the transforming **power** of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul reminds us: **“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit by the way you live...be filled with the Holy Spirit...pray in the Spirit at all times.”** (Ephesians: 4:30, 5:18, 6:18).

As I have repeated many times, we receive the **Holy Spirit** whenever we participate in a sacrament, including those that can be repeated frequently: the sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, as in every Sacrament, the Holy Spirit together with the Church are at work. As we enter the First Week of **Advent** this weekend, let us prepare ourselves by attending our **Advent Penance Service** at 7 pm this coming **Tuesday, December 4**, and then let us walk together with the **Holy Spirit** during the whole Advent Season preparing our hearts for receiving the **joy** and **peace** of the **First Coming of Jesus at Christmas!**

One in Christ,
Fr. Alain