

Easter 6
5.10.26

It was getting late. And I was a bit panicked. I had a big test the next day and I did little to no studying for it. And I didn't remember the little bit I had studied. I closed my textbook and decided to go to bed. A classmate once told me that you could put your textbook under your pillow and while you slept some of that material would sink into your brain. Skeptical of such advice but desperate, that's what I did. It sort of made sense to my eight year old mind.

The next day I took the test. As you might imagine, I did not do well. Plus, my neck was a bit stiff from sleeping with a textbook under my pillow all night long.

If something is important or challenging, we spend time preparing for it. A couple decides to marry only after they date for a time and participate in preparation sessions for marriage. When we want to make an impactful presentation at work or school we spend ample time preparing slides, charts, handouts, and our talking points.

Things that are important demand our attention. Things that might be a challenge require preparation.

The setting of today's gospel is the Last Supper. Chapters 14-17 of St. John's gospel make up what is called the "Farewell Discourse." In it, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the challenging days ahead where he will undergo his crucifixion and death. By preparing for that challenging event Jesus assures the disciples he will sustain them by the power of his Spirit. Not

only that, as they open their hearts to him, his Spirit will make them more courageous, wise, understanding, and compassionate than they could ever imagine.

This gospel is given to us today in anticipation of the great Solemnity of Pentecost which will occur two weeks from today. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon those gathered in the Upper Room after the death of Christ. Two thousand years later, Christ is still sending his Holy Spirit upon us. In order for the Holy Spirit to settle upon our hearts and take hold of us, Christ asks us to prepare a place for him. Perhaps that preparation means going to confession. Perhaps it means asking, in an intentional way, for a specific gift or gifts of the Holy Spirit to come upon us. As you might recall, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are *wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord* (or making the Lord first in our lives). We take this moment, right now, to prepare our hearts and minds so that we are ready to receive those gifts. We also work steadily and each day to prepare our hearts and minds to receive God's precious gifts. God not only is the giver of all good gifts, but he is generous with each gift he gives. While God is generous with those gifts, they only settle upon us if we prepare fertile soil for them as well as a place of welcome upon which those precious gifts can rest.

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Philip ministered to the people of Samaria. That in itself was a testimony to Philip's great faith and trust in God. You only have to recall the story of the *Good Samaritan* to know that Samaritans and Jews were sworn enemies. But Philip understood that the Samaritans were God's children. Because of

that, Philip made it his mission to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the Samaritans. They responded by converting to the Christian faith. They received the blessing of faith because they had prepared a place in their hearts where God could settle. And they opened their hearts even more in order to receive God's precious grace. Even though the Samaritans did not receive the fulness of the Holy Spirit at the time of their baptism, Peter and John traveled there to pray over these newly formed Christians. The Samaritans received the fulness of the Holy Spirit as they were prayed over because they continued to open their hearts God's saving grace. As he did with the Samaritans, God stands ready to bless us in abundant ways. We only have to open our hearts to those blessings. Furthermore, God isn't a stingy giver. He blesses us in ways beyond what we could ever hope for or imagine.

If we want to grow in God's love, today's readings instruct us to prepare to receive God's grace and to create a place in our hearts for that grace by loving others as God loves us.

To that end, a story comes to mind which captures both those things – preparing and loving.

A fellow priest told me this true story a few years back. A man came into his office one day full of anger and hatred toward his wife. He not only wanted to divorce her, but he wanted to get even with her for how he thought she had slighted him. He wanted to hurt her as much as he could. The priest knew there wasn't anything he could say to change the man's mind, so he said, "Why don't you try this? Go home and act as if you really love your wife. Tell her how much she means to you. Praise her

morning, noon, and night. Go out of your way to be as kind and considerate as possible. Spare no effort to please her. After you've convinced her of your undying love, which may take several weeks or months, then tell her you're filing for divorce. That ought to hurt." With revenge in his eyes, the man said, "That's great. Will she ever be surprised!" And that's exactly what he did for a couple of weeks. He acted as though he loved her.

As months passed by, the priest realized that the man never called back. So, the next time the priest saw him, he asked about the divorce. "Never!" the man said. "I discovered I really do love her." His actions had changed the way he felt.

Jesus is inviting us to enter into a deeper relationship with him. We prepare for that by living with a heart like Christ's – that is, living in hope, treating others with gentleness, and revering them. Doing so can be life-changing – for ourselves and for the world.

Do you wish to be filled with the abundance of the Holy Spirit? Do you want to live with the heart of Christ? Do you want to bring the presence of Christ to the world? Then you have to get to work – this very moment. Begin today by opening your heart to God's love and praying for his love to descend upon you in a profound way. Let that love and the gift of his grace settle upon your heart. Never stop preparing. Never stop praying. Never stop loving. Never stop participating in God's sacraments. And never be satisfied with how you live out your faith. Do more. Be more. Love more. It is in giving and living like that that God dwells even more intimately and powerfully in our lives.

A great test is coming, and is in fact already upon us. Let us get to work. Let us not grow slack or delay. God's Spirit is anxious to enter into our minds and hearts. Will we do the difficult but rewarding work of letting him in?

Amen? Amen.