

Pentecost
5.24.26

The youngest sibling in my family of eight is my sister. She was nicknamed “the Princess” - for that, indeed, is what she was and still is. She was the apple of my parents’ eyes. She was adorable and full of personality. She could do no wrong. Maybe for all those reasons, the Princess ended up being teased more than the others.

On the morning after my ordination to the priesthood (the day when newly ordained priests celebrate Mass for the first time), I was giving the Princess a hard time. I believe I good-naturedly chased her around the house. All of a sudden, the Princess stopped dead in her tracks. She turned around and with all the confidence in the world declared, “I can’t believe they ordained you.”

That took the wind out of my sails. The Princess walked off with her mission accomplished. And I stood there wondering, “yes, I can’t believe they ordained me as well.” There were others who were smarter, wiser, and holier than me. But the bishop, in fact, did ordain me. Wonders never cease.

A few weeks earlier, I asked the Princess to do one of the readings at my first Mass. She was all of nine at the time. She agreed and was assigned the first reading from the Book of Genesis. That particular Sunday, the first reading described Abraham meeting up with a mysterious king and priest of a town called Salem. His name was Melchizedek. As my sister was preparing for that reading, each of my brothers came up to her and told her that the pronunciation of that mysterious figure

was Mel-cheese-a-deck. Wisely, the Princess checked with my mom who gave her the correct pronunciation. My mom then corrected her boys. Throughout the morning, the boys continued to tell the Princess that she was going to end up pronouncing the word like Mel-cheese-a-deck.

After the opening prayer concluded and the congregation sat down, the Princess came forward to deliver the first reading. She did beautifully and was remarkably poised. When she got to that dreaded word, she paused and looked up at my brothers. With unflappable confidence she proudly proclaimed, “Melchizedek” pausing to smile and nod at my brothers as if to say, “Take that, bothersome brothers; you’re not the boss of me!”

I share this story with you to show that the Holy Spirit is alive and well in the Church today. When we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost, we might assume that what we celebrate is some long-past event. Pentecost recalls the Holy Spirit coming upon those gathered in the Upper Room. They remained there after the crucifixion of Christ wondering if they would suffer a fate similar to what happened to Jesus on the cross. The Spirit is represented in the scriptures as “breath”, like the breath of God that brought life to Adam formed from the clay of the earth. Or the wind that split the Red Sea into two walls of water allowing the Hebrews to pass from the clutches of the Egyptians to the new and Promised Land. The other image of the Holy Spirit is “tongues of fire” descending upon all those gathered in the Upper Room after the crucifixion of Christ. It so animated the disciples that they went out into the world to fearlessly preach the Good News. What each person heard was the Good News proclaimed in their native tongue.

While that past event was spectacular, the Spirit continues to touch our lives today in profound ways. But the Holy Spirit also operates in small but equally significant ways.

It was the Holy Spirit who raised up in me the thought of becoming a priest. I wasn't particularly holy, talented, or even mature in those days when I entered the seminary. (The jury is STILL out as to whether or not I have improved in this last-named area of personal development.) I always struggled with feeling unworthy to be a priest. But a wise spiritual director changed my outlook (and, I dare say, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit) when he shared this thought with me, "God doesn't always call the qualified. He qualifies the called."

It was the Holy Spirit that was with me when I first became a pastor and had no idea what I was doing. It was the Holy Spirit that helped me to lead that parish to relocating to another property and building a brand new church. It was the Holy Spirit that strengthened me and gave me courage when I traveled to Haiti about eight times to do missionary work there and to do the same in Nicaragua four or five times. It was the Holy Spirit that helped me to do justice work with FAST, to address mayors and county commissioners to set up a trust fund for affordable housing. It was the Holy Spirit who accompanied me every time I walked into the Hillsborough County jail and minister to the inmates there.

The Princess was right. I can't believe they ordained me. But the Holy Spirit had something entirely different in mind than I ever imagined for myself. The Holy Spirit moved me, directed me,

and challenged me to do things and go to places that I would never have chosen on my own.

It was the same Holy Spirit that made my little sister, at just nine years old, stop in her tracks and confront me about my boorish treatment of her. It was the Holy Spirit that gave her confidence and courage to read before a congregation of 1,000 at my first Mass and boldly acclaim “Melchizedek.” With the Holy Spirit we can do anything, as the Princess so daringly witnessed.

That same Holy Spirit is in you. The Spirit came to you in baptism. The Spirit further animated you when you were confirmed. That Spirit is with you in a powerful and profound way, coming to you and me whenever we ask.

The Holy Spirit is with you, compelling you and demanding that you serve God by serving your sisters and brothers. Sure, you can shy away from that call. You can make excuses. You can say, “I don’t have time. I’m not holy enough. That’s not my cup of tea. I’m not worthy. That’s someone else’s work; it’s not my particular calling.” But folks, the Holy Spirit won’t hear of it. The Spirit will keep coming at you to do the Father’s will. Doing the Father’s will is what builds up God’s Kingdom among us and makes Christ visible to all.

By virtue of the Holy Spirit, you have been made a Prince or a Princess in God’s Kingdom. Open your hearts to what God wants you to do. Be confident and courageous. For the Spirit gives us those gifts and more in abundance. Today is the day to acknowledge those gifts and ask for God’s grace to use them for

his honor and glory – courageously, selflessly, and fully each
and every day!

Amen? Amen!