

6th Sunday of Easter 2020: Living with the Holy Spirit in a “New Normal”

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

Peace in the Lord!

Like so many of you, I struggled with this "new normal." I am anxious about how to minister effectively amidst challenges that I am going to encounter with this "new normal" reality. But the messages I read on Facebook from those who watched the live streaming give me comfort. I find myself surrounded by heavenly lights. Every morning, after I offered the Mass, I read these messages, their simplicity and directness inspire me. I believe these messages are signs that God is moving us closer to him and being intimate with one another. The written good thoughts and prayers offered to eliminate the distance that the social distancing imposed on us and make us one. I believe this is one of the movements of the Holy Spirit in our times. The Holy Spirit always builds harmony amid confusion. Amid the uncertainty, it feeds hope towards the better tomorrow.

Today, we heard our Lord Jesus giving assurance to his disciples about his new presence with them. He said, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. In a little while, the world will no longer see me, but you will see me because I live, and you will live" (Jn. 14:18-19). This is confirmed through the sending of another advocate, the Holy Spirit. And this is the "new normal" of his presence with his disciples.

When Jesus withdraws his visible presence from the world, he does not withdraw his spiritual presence. He is always present in his Church, especially in the liturgy, where he ministers through his priests, speaks through the Scriptures and sanctifies us through the sacraments. He forever remains with us. Just as the Holy Spirit assists, guides, and enlightens the disciples to understand and live the commands of Jesus, the workings of the Holy Spirit continue in our times in many different ways. Someone said that the Holy Spirit is somehow like a coach who is always by our side, to instruct and correct us when we make mistakes, to encourage and motivate us when we feel down, to challenge and inspire us to be the best we could, to defend us and fight for our rights when the judges are unfair to us. I couldn't agree more from these descriptions of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church is significant to us Catholics. It is one of the cornerstones on which our Church is built. The Holy Spirit guides our Church down through the ages keeping it fundamentally free from error and faithful to the Apostles' teachings. Without it, the Church ceases to exist.

Yes, it is comforting to hear the assurance of our Lord Jesus to his disciples, that he is not letting them be orphaned. However, they are also commanded to keep his presence alive by keeping his commandment. This commandment is to love one another as Jesus loves them -- to keep in their memory Jesus' ways of loving. Because they did keep Jesus' way of loving, there were amazing things that happened in their lives. We learned from the narratives of the Acts of Apostles the disciples' response to keep the commandment -- they lived as brothers and sisters in a community, none of them lacked physical necessities because they held everything in common, they ministered to those in need and vulnerable in their midst, they proclaimed the message of Jesus and laid hands to new members to bestow upon them the Holy Spirit. They indeed became a "new normal" community.

Like the disciples, we, as Church, is the presence of Jesus in our time. We are gifted with the Holy Spirit. It is the gift we first received in our baptism, that we renew as we enter the Easter season. This gift accompanies the power to transform the world around us through the burning love that Jesus started to ignite with his first followers. While the Holy Spirit during this time of social distancing is blessing us an increase in longing for community gathering, we are reminded that the message to love one another is the Holy Spirit's breathing in the Church waiting for our response.

Let our love for Jesus makes us grateful to God and generous in giving time for prayer and reflection. Let our love of him leads us to be humble and sincere in our dealings with people and responsive to the needs of others.

Let our love for Jesus leads us to be patient and forgiving. Let our love for Jesus leads to take care of the environment and responsible for using God's gifts. Let us express this love in our fidelity to our duties and our responsibilities. Let this love lead us to live as brothers and sisters in the community, and to care gently those in need. Then and only then are we bringing to life the "new normal" community of the disciples in the past to our present time.

Let us join in the Holy Spirit's action to create a culture to assure one another of our prayer and gentle care. For if we love one another, Jesus and the Father dwell in our hearts and our midst. It is a profound blessing for all of us!

In Christ,

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