

Pentecost, St. Rose of Lima 100th Anniversary

Introduction

I'm delighted to celebrate this long-delayed closing Mass to mark the 100th Anniversary of St. Rose of Lima Parish. Please accept my warmest congratulations on reaching this milestone and my warmest thanks for all that this parish family does in service to its parishioners and the surrounding community. With you I want to thank Fr. Rob De Mattei and his parish staff for their devoted service to St. Rose of Lima, day in and day out.

I read with much interest the brief history of St. Rose of Lima that was sent to me in advance of my visit. Today, yet again, we celebrate that history not merely because it is interesting to read about times long past but also to express our thanks to the Lord for the blessings of years and for the deep faith and hard work of those who have gone before us: those who came from near and far to found St. Rose; the priests and deacons who have served here through the years; the religious sisters who taught in the school and in religious education; the lay women and men who give of themselves so generously; and, most of all, the generations of families who made St. Rose of Lima their spiritual home through thick and thin. The history of the parish includes severe setbacks such as church and hall fires, collapsing roofs, and changing demographics. It is a story of indomitable faith and service.

Locating the Parish on the Gospel Map

The map locates this parish on 4th Street near the Brooklyn section of Baltimore but the more important map on which to be located is the living Word of God. And here too St. Rose of Lima Parish is securely located. Indeed, today's Scripture readings are a case in point, indeed, *the* case in point: for they describe that first Pentecost Sunday when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles like tongues of fire and when the house where they were staying shook because of the strong driving wind that signaled the coming of the Holy Spirit. Now, we don't want any more fire and certainly don't want damaging winds, but we surely do ask for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon this parish.

What happened at the first Pentecost? Well, as you know it wasn't easy being one of the Lord's first disciples. They had no roadmap to follow! They acknowledged Jesus to be their Teacher and even their Savior but they weren't quite sure what that meant. Sometimes they thought he would be an earthly ruler who would free Israel from the domination of the Roman Empire. At other times, they strained to understand what Jesus meant when he spoke to the people using comparisons of all sorts. When Jesus was condemned and died on the Cross they were shaken. Most of the disciples went into hiding and Peter even denied Jesus three times.

We might think that things were better after the Resurrection. After all, Jesus was back, radiant in his Risen glory. And indeed the disciples were overjoyed to see the Risen Lord. Yet, Scripture says that they were still afraid and still entertained doubts. They were confused and hesitant. They wanted to stay put or to return to life as it used to be. But the Risen Lord kept appearing to them and instructing them and as he was ascending into heaven he told them to watch, wait, and pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit. That's where we find them today. That's also where we find ourselves today.

After the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, then, even though they couldn't see Jesus physically, they knew him and were closer to him than ever. Because of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' love burned in their hearts and the truth of the Gospel shone in their minds, so much so that they were no longer timid, afraid, or confused - but rather bold and courageous witnesses to Christ. They went out and started preaching, such that everyone could understand and began to win over many adherents to Christ and to his Church. On Pentecost day the Church was born. On this Anniversary Day of St. Rose of Lima, may this parish experience new life and new vigor in its mission to bear witness to Jesus and the Gospel in this neighborhood and far beyond.

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit

In fact, that's exactly what Pope Francis is calling us to do. He is challenging each of us to be missionary disciples, full time and fully committed followers of His Son, Jesus Christ, who are filled with the Holy Spirit so much so that we are willing to bear witness to Christ by word and example. Pope Francis is urging us to lead lives of joyful faith, fervent worship, and of service to the poor and the needy, so that we

will living images of Jesus to our families, neighbors, friends & enemies.

In today's reading from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks about what it means to live by the Spirit not the flesh. Living according to the flesh means living as if God does not exist. All we live for is our own comfort and pleasure. We engage in the kind of bad behavior Paul describes and in the process a lot of people get hurt and in two ways: sin brings us and a lot of other people in our lives much unhappiness and misery; and even worse, sin deprives those around us of a clear witness to Jesus. When we live by the spirit, on the other hand, we are building people up, giving them encouragement, helping them along the way. We can tell we are living by the spirit if the fruits of the Holy Spirit are evident in our lives, in our families, and in this parish family...these fruits are: 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.' Those are the qualities of a true follower of Jesus. Those are the qualities of a parish that is a true community of disciples. And those are the qualities that attract others to Christ and the Church. This is how we preach Christ in our daily lives.

Community of Mercy

Of course, none of us is the perfect disciple. The only exception to that rule is the Blessed Virgin Mary who was conceived without sin and who never committed any sin. The rest of us, well, we need the Lord's mercy, myself very much included.

That is why, on the first Easter Sunday evening, the Risen Lord appeared to the Apostles and breathed on them, that is to say, he imparted to them the Holy Spirit so that they would extend his ministry of forgiving sin. This beautiful gift is available to us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, sometimes called the Sacrament of Mercy. It is a Sacrament we should receive often and worthily. The more we share in the Lord's mercy toward us, the more merciful we become, to friends, enemies, and even perfect strangers. And a community that is marked by mercy, also attracts others to itself. Indeed, Jesus' healing love must be "translated" into works of charity.

Here too, you are located squarely on the Gospel map. I think of the quiet neighbor-to-neighbor assistance given to parishioners who found themselves struggling because of a job loss or a fire or some other personal tragedy. I think of the

organized charities of this parish; let me mention the reactivated St. Vincent de Paul Society, the casseroles served at the Beans and Bread Soup Kitchen, the formation of the Pastoral Visitors Program, and the participation in the Homemaker Service sponsored by Catholic Charities – not to mention the wonderful outreach of this parish family to the elderly. These are not merely good deeds but a way of proclaiming the Gospel, of being witness that Jesus lives in our midst and extends his healing touch to all of us.

May the Holy Spirit continue to overshadow this parish family that you may continue to bear witness to Christ and to his love and win many to the salvation Jesus won for us by his Death and Resurrection! May God bless us and keep us always in his love!