

## PENTECOST 2013

I'm going to ask you to do something you might think is kind of odd,...and I hope you'll go along with it. ...I'd like you to turn to the people next to you, and say to them, "I'm on a mission from God"...Ok, now do it again, but this time like you really mean it....Raise your hand if you felt stupid doing that?...Well, if you did,...it's probably because you think that ordinary, everyday people can't possibly be on a mission from God...God chooses special, saintly, gifted people to carry out His work, right?...Wrong!...How can I say that?...It's right here in our Gospel...On that 1<sup>st</sup> Easter Sunday, Christ appeared to His disciples who –out of fear for their lives, had locked themselves in a room...and the 1st words He said to them were, "Peace be with you...As the Father has sent me, **so I send you**..."..Then He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."...Now, these were the same disciples who had misunderstood Him, denied Him, and abandoned Him...And what did Jesus do?...Did He chew them out and tell them how disappointed He was? Did He replace them? ...No! He laid Holy Spirit power on them and sent them out to minister to the world.

Several weeks later,... just before He ascended to heaven, Jesus told those same disciples to wait until they received the power of the Holy Spirit,...and then go and be His witnesses to the ends of the earth...And shortly after that, on the 1<sup>st</sup> Pentecost Sunday - as we heard in our 1<sup>st</sup> reading - the Holy Spirit suddenly came over those disciples in a dramatic and powerful way,... as a strong blast of wind and tongues of fire....Filled with the Holy Spirit, those scared, clueless disciples took on their mission of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ with confidence and courage,...They went out and began to transform the world...From that time forward, everyone of us who has stood before the minister at our Confirmation and heard the words, "Peace be with you,"...and been anointed with the Sacred Oil and sealed with the Holy Spirit,...everyone of us - with the same faults, and same failings and same fears as those 1st disciples - has also been sent out into the world...We too have been given a mission from God...."As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

That 1<sup>st</sup> Pentecost is called the birthday of the Church, and it is,...but we will miss the full meaning of Pentecost if we reduce it to just a celebration of what happened a long time ago...That 1<sup>st</sup> Pentecost began an enterprise that continues to this day...Pentecost is when the Church of Jesus Christ got its marching orders...when all followers of Jesus Christ were given a job to do,...and Pentecost is the day God gave us the power - Holy Spirit power – to do that job, ...to carry out our mission...And just what is that mission?...*To go and be witnesses for Jesus Christ...To preach Jesus Christ....*That's the number one job of every Christian man, woman and child – *to go and preach Jesus Christ!....*You heard me right,...preaching Jesus Christ is the job of EVERY Christian.

Now I'll bet many of you are thinking..."Hold on a minute, isn't preaching the job of priests and deacons and ministers,...not us ordinary people?"...Well, yeah, it is our job,...but we're only God's Plan A,...and Plan A just isn't getting the job done...There are too many people who aren't getting the message of Jesus Christ preached to them...You guys are God's Plan B, ...and you are not ordinary...You are the frontline troops....You are out there in the trenches where real life is lived,...where there are people all around you trying to handle life's trials and troubles without Jesus Christ in their lives,...people struggling to navigate through life's mine-fields without any awareness of God,...without any spiritual resources..YOU ARE God's Plan B!

Ok, who's ready to carry out Plan B?...Who's ready to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people who desperately need to hear it?... Raise your hand...All right, it seems most/all of you feel like preaching is the last thing in the world you want to do...Maybe you're an introvert ...or you don't think you know enough,. ...or you don't want to push your religion on anyone...Maybe

it just scares you to death...But you know what?...Many of you are already doing it...You are preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ!...How? ...Well, listen to what St. Francis of Assisi said about it: *"Preach the Gospel always; if necessary, use words."* ...What St. Francis was saying is we can do a better job preaching the Gospel by our actions than by our words...The best way to tell others about Jesus is to live in a way that shows them how following Jesus makes our life better and every life we touch better. We don't have to get up on a pulpit and talk about it...How we live the Gospel will do all the talking.

When others see you trying to follow Jesus Christ – however imperfectly – in how you conduct your life,...in how you handle your relationships,...in the values you let guide all your decisions, ...when they see how following Jesus gives you the strength to reject the world's temptations to go the other way...When others see this,...they may not know it, but they are having the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached to them... When they see you offer forgiveness to someone who hurts you,...when they see you refuse to judge what's in another person's heart,...when they see your unconditional care for the poor,...when they see you stand up for the sacredness of ALL human life, they are having the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached to them.

As you live your life in faithfulness to Jesus, ...people are watching,...and what they see may make them want what you have:...your peace, your joy, your faith and trust in the Lord...What you do speaks louder to them about Jesus Christ than all the words any preacher can shout from a pulpit....That's your part in God's Plan B, ...to let people see there's a different way to live – the way of Jesus Christ....And if what they see gets them moving toward Jesus,...then they will begin to seek the truth,...and when they do, the Holy Spirit will lead them to the truth - Jesus Christ...That's the Holy Spirit's part in Plan B.

So ok, we can carry out our mission to preach Jesus Christ by LIVING the Gospel of Jesus Christ...But, there will be times when words are necessary, when we have someone who really needs to hear about the God we believe in and trust in and love,...someone who needs to know how wonderful our God is...a God who loves them and values them,...a God who is on their side...a God who will never give up on them even if they give up on Him,...a God that will give them the strength and guidance to face all of life's challenges. ...a merciful God who will help them put the past behind and start over again.

For times like these – when words are needed - we can draw inspiration from this true story:

Fr. Milton Rudnick, pastor of a parish on NYC's Lower East Side, tells about the time when his rectory doorbell rang,...and he was surprised to see 6-yr old Billy standing there, holding the hand of a little girl about his age...

"Billy, what are you doing here?" ...

"Father, this is my friend, Celia... She doesn't know anything about Jesus, so I brought her here so you could tell her about Him."...

The Pastor was stunned...Here was this little boy who rarely paid attention in religion class, bringing his friend across some of the busiest streets of New York so she could learn about Jesus....The Pastor wanted to see if Billy had learned anything, so he said,

"Billy,,you know about Jesus, so why don't you tell Celia about Him?"...

Without any hesitation, Billy began to do just that.

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*"Celia, Jesus was the nicest person who ever lived... He was so good to everyone. If they were sick, He would make them better.... If they were hungry, He would feed them. If they were sad, He'd cheer them up...But some bad people hated Him, and one day they caught Him and they hurt Him and they killed him."...*

*"I think I heard about that once," Celia remarked.*

*Billy continued,*

*"But you know what?... He didn't have to let them do that to Him.... He wasn't just a man. He was God, too, and He could've stopped them....But He didn't, and you know why, Celia? He did it for us, so that we wouldn't have to be punished for the bad things that we do." ...*

*The little girl was deeply moved: "Aw, he shouldn't have done that." ...*

*"But He didn't stay dead!" Billy exclaimed. "Three days later He came back to life again. He went to see his friends and were they ever glad to see Him...Then after a while He went back to heaven, but you know what... He's still here anyway. We can't see Him, but He's here all the time,. And when we're good it makes Him happy... And when we're bad it makes Him sad. ....But He'll forgive us if we are really sorry, and, someday Celia, He's coming back from heaven and we WILL be able to see Him, and He's going to take us to be with Him forever!"*

That was pretty darn good for a 6-yr old...He conveyed the entire Gospel of Jesus Christ in very simple yet beautiful language. (I think some of us preachers can learn from him.)...

My friends, there are people around you who desperately need to know Jesus Christ...If you haven't been doing it already, are you ready to tackle the mission God has given you?... Will you let the Holy Spirit power fill you as it did the disciples on that 1<sup>st</sup> Pent?...Are you ready to GO preach Jesus Christ in your corner of the world...by your actions.... and if necessary by your words?... I hope so, because you are God's Plan B,...and I don't think God has a Plan C... May the Holy Spirit empower you as you go! AMEN!

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