

**Solemnity of Pentecost**  
**May 19, 2013**  
**Homily for the Anglican Use Mass**  
**of**  
**St. Thomas More Catholic Parish**  
**celebrated at**  
**St. Joseph Catholic Church**  
**Scranton, PA**  
**John 20:19-23**

All my nephews in Pennsylvania play baseball, and I had an interesting discussion this week with one of them about the batting order. He told me he was disappointed because even though he had a good average, he was at the bottom of the order. I told him that batting order in Little League is not all about who is good and who isn't. It has more to do with what the coach has to do to win. I used myself as an example and reminded him that every player by rule has to play two innings at least. So when I was playing, the coach always put me at the top of the order, not because I was any good, not because I deserved to be there, but because he wanted to see me bat quickly so he could get it over with and remove me from the game after I'd played the minimum requirement. The fact that it didn't matter how well or poorly I performed meant that I was free from pressure. I could more easily concentrate on the task at hand—getting on base; and I did.

This is the same freedom that the forgiveness of sins gives us. Jesus makes the connection in the Gospel between the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins. Thus, we receive the promised gift of God living within us, not because we deserve it, not because we are worthy of it, but rather in spite of our own unworthiness. We are, therefore, free from the burden of proving ourselves, of demonstrating our worthiness, and then are free to concentrate on the task at hand: nurturing the gift we have received for the building up of the Church.

Each of us must understand, especially those who have received the grace of confirmation, that we have been endowed with particular gifts for the building up of Christ's Church, as St. Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Corinthians. We have not received these gifts because we deserved them, certainly not because we were worthy of them. After all, all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. This truth is a great leveler and should prevent us from becoming haughty when we consider the job God has given us to do. If we are the Pope, we have sinned and have not this responsibility because we deserve it. If we are the Pope's chambermaid, we have sinned; and we must give thanks that, even so, God has still chosen to use us in some manner. We have not been discounted or ignored, but given a specific job to do for the good of the Church. We don't receive graces, large or small, because we deserve them.

This means that whatever gifts God has given us, not only the ones we received at baptism—the forgiveness of sins, membership in the Church and the strength to live out our baptismal call as priest, prophet, and king—whatever gifts we received in addition to those that everyone receives, we are free to nurture.

I figured out, for example, pretty early on that God had not called me to become a professional baseball player. Then I figured out I definitely wasn't supposed to be in the theater. When I was in college, I figured out God didn't want me in the army; and when I was living in London, I learned God didn't want me to be a lawyer, either. He wanted me in the Church; so I went to seminary and after some detours and delays I was ordained a priest. Never for a second did I think I deserved this grace. Even now I know I am unworthy of it. But I have been able to concentrate on it. I didn't waste time proving I belonged in the major leagues, neither did I go to law school imagining that if I showed God my law

degree He'd give me the graces to do a job He didn't want for me in the first place. I did not strive to prove to God anything, but instead I tried to listen to what He would have me do.

This isn't to say there haven't been surprises. God doesn't give us a road map other than to indicate our destination is Him in heaven before the throne of grace. We have to follow Him step by step, trusting that, even when we can't see it, the job we have been given through a particular dispensation of the Holy Spirit is an important one. It isn't for anybody else, and we don't deserve it; but it is for the salvation of souls. It is given to us so we can help get others to their destination.

And so we've been given our jobs within our parish, too. The tough part is figuring out what they are. Mr. Campbell knows he's supposed to be our Music Director, and Mrs. Sanderson knows—she's known for years—that she's supposed to play the organ for us. Mr. Reese wears a bunch of hats, among them usher and counter; and in the middle of the week he's the parish carpenter offering dozens and dozens of volunteer hours to make the parish rectory a home for the Bergman family. I could go on, but my point is to ask you, "What is your role?"

The feast of Pentecost is the day for us to ask what the Holy Spirit has given us the ability to do for the building up of Christ's Church. The apostles were given the ability to speak in languages they did not even know so that Jews from all over the Roman Empire would go home from their pilgrimage to tell their kinsmen about Jesus. We won't likely get that gift, but we have received something that will draw others closer to him who loves us even unto death.

If you don't have any idea, or if you're still convinced you can't do your job because you are not worthy, or if you think you deserve something more important, come talk to me. I can set you straight about what you do and don't deserve, but we can also talk about your gifts and how they will be a benefit to those we are called to reconcile to Holy Mother Church.

Our graces aren't deserved, but there is one condition if our conversation is to be fruitful. We must have the orientation of the woman we crowned today. "Let it be to me according to your word."