

[Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ps. 47; Eph. 4:1-13; Mark 16:15-20]

Happy Mother's Day! It is an appropriate day to consider the ultimate possibilities of love. Through the centuries, women take the risk of love to bring children into the world. Often in terrible circumstances, under difficult, lonely, economically strained conditions. Women became mothers at the risk of their lives in times past and still in many parts of the world where medical care is sketchy or non-existent. And once the children are born, good mothers often continue to put the welfare of their children above their own need for rest, for recreation, for all they might have had without the burden of care for dependent lives.

Whether they stay at home with their children or must work outside to provide their care, mothers remain the primary model of constancy in our world. Even mothers who neglect or deny their children prove the model because we expect them to behave otherwise.

A mother's love is irreplaceable. If we got it from our mothers, it needs no explanation; if we didn't get it, we may spend our whole lives looking for it or suffering from lack of it. A father's love, of course, can be equally heroic and is certainly as indispensable, if in distinct ways. Psychologists have only begun to explore how we need our parents. The happy adult will originally have had, or restored for themselves through mentors, the necessary sources of love and constancy we seem to require at the root of ourselves.

Maybe this isn't so strange, since God is love, and we are God's children. Love is literally at the root of our identity. We seem to know this and need it as much as air, food, and shelter. We're made

from love, and for happiness, according to the most basic catechisms.

Unless and until we discover this love for ourselves, we won't really be happy. Like Augustine said, we're restless until we rest in ultimate love. So Jesus tells us: Remain in me, as I remain in my Father. How do we find our way to this kind of love, especially if we didn't experience it originally or lost it along the way?

First of all, we still call upon Him. We still accept His mission to go out to the entire world and proclaim the Good News. We pray in the words of St. Paul:

"May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, give us a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in the full and lasting knowledge of Him. May we live in a manner worthy of the call we have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit."

We are called to accept the mission and to fuel the mission.

Spring is a time of hopeful transitions. The cold death of winter shoots up in the green and brilliance of spring. This is the season for other transitional experiences to happen: graduations, with celebrations and sharing memories of years gone by.

It is also the season for weddings and priesthood ordinations – five men will be ordained to the Priesthood for the Archdiocese of Detroit, this Saturday -- and First Communions and Confirmations.

Today's Feast of the Ascension is very much like that. Traditionally, we are told that forty days lapsed between the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and His return to the

Father in glory. That's why Ascension was celebrated on a Thursday. But for the convenience of working Catholics and the chance to give this feast day the prominence it deserves, it has been moved in most dioceses of our country from Thursday to the Seventh Sunday of Easter. So Ascension Thursday becomes Ascension Sunday!

And what a time of transition this has been for the disciples of Jesus! He is taken up into Heaven. His successor, St. Peter, the First Pope, is a mere shadow of their former leader. So tentative are the Apostles, so frightened still, that they are coached by Jesus to "stay in Jerusalem" and remain there for nine days until the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Consoler, the Helper, will come to them. This is the first recorded "novena" or 9-day prayer in the Catholic Church! And they have the Blessed Virgin Mary with them.

The Good News of the Gospel is that the story doesn't end with Jesus returning to Heaven. That's Part II of a three-part story. You and I make up Part III. "All that Jesus did and taught" now becomes all that you and I must do and teach in order for the Kingdom of God to come to earth, and to remain here until Jesus returns for His Great Curtain Call at the end of time. AMEN! ALLELUIA!

[Readings: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104; 1 Cor. 12:3b-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23]

I am a big fan of the actress Meryl Streep. She is incredibly gifted in creating character performances of the humorous women in the movies *She-Devil*, and the *Devil Wears Prada* and *Death Becomes Her* to heart-wrenching women like in *Sophie's Choice* and the most disturbing Mother Superior in the movie *Doubt*.

In that movie, she suspects an arrogant and overly clerical parish priest of child abuse. The movie pulls the audience in the same direction, until in the final scenes. It appears that the priest is completely innocent, but his life, his reputation and his vocation have been irreparably shattered. In the final scene, she admits to a young novice sister (played by Amy Adams, who felt the priest was innocent all along) that she had DOUBTS about her accusations and is herself torn apart with the guilt and shame she visited to the innocent priest.

If the riveting movie *Doubt* teaches us nothing else, it's that there's always room for being dead wrong. We don't like to entertain that notion even in the privacy of our unspoken thoughts. It's especially critical for those who are parents; those who teach and guide the impressionable; for leaders of every kind, and policymakers and deciders. It's crucial for all of us to try to be sure about what we claim is true. Because when we are wrong, we're often taking others down the path of error with us.

How do we avoid the painful consequences of being wrong about what we hold true? First, we accept our mortal limitations.

At the end of his life, the great Renaissance artist Michelangelo had the humility to say of his art: "I am still learning." The guy who did

the Sistine Chapel ceiling, the Pietà, and the astonishing statue of David -- still learning? If one of the most gifted artists of any age had not reached his potential after creating such dazzling beauty, it's a safe bet you and I haven't maxed out our understanding either. There's always more to read, to ponder, and to comprehend. And when we've done a lifetime of that, we've still got all that's yet to be revealed to discover.

So Task Number One for avoiding error is to *keep on learning*. Number Two is the twin sister of that task: *stay humble*. There's nothing like pride to trip us up and make fools of geniuses. The humble, by contrast, remain teachable. The third necessary element is to *pray*, asking the Holy Spirit for guidance. Pentecost has no meaning if it remains a static historical event. The Holy Spirit is given for our help. But the Spirit won't cross the line of human freedom. If we want the aid of the indwelling Spirit, we have to ask.

For Christians, those three steps will keep us out of harm's way. The Spirit of truth, as Jesus says, can only lead us to truth -- and will lead us to all truth. Jesus makes no exceptions, doesn't outline any grey fuzzy areas where we'll have to wade in on our own.

If we don't know what to do, we should pray and ask. If we're 100 percent For Sure Christians, those three steps will keep us out of harm's way. The Spirit of truth, as Jesus says, can only lead us to truth -- and will lead us to ALL truth. If we're 100 percent sure what we should do, we might want to pray about that, too!

I remember making the decision, in my second year of seminary formation, to leave the seminary. I was tired, sick, and sure the whole vocation thing was a big mistake. My spiritual director, who

supported my decision, said the next step was to tell the head of the seminary, the rector, about my decision. I met with him, and after a moment of silence, he said, “No, Nick. This is not the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Evil One, the Devil. Take the summer off, go home, rest, and prepare for your fall final exam re-takes. Because of Monsignor Charles Murphy, I stand before you as a priest today, 45 years later. Here is what our Scriptures tell us:

Wind, fire, speech, and courage are the gifts the Spirit bestows on those who pray. Without the breath of God, the living will surely perish. The works of the flesh are clearly distinct from the fruits of life in the Spirit. The Spirit of truth guides us to truth and not to error.

As sharers in their heritage and as present-day disciples, consider these questions:

- ! How has the Spirit worked in YOUR life?
- ! In what ways are YOU “sent”? How do YOU witness your faith?
- ! What are the particular gifts, forms of service, abilities, and work you can offer to the Church? How do your gifts contribute to the building up of the Church? How can you encourage others to use their gifts to do the same?

I close my reflection today with a familiar prayer that I have prayed since the Sixth Grade when I prepared for Confirmation. A prayer to the Holy Spirit. Say it with me if you remember it:

*Prayer to the Holy Spirit*

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful  
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

And you shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,

did instruct the hearts of the faithful,

grant that by the same Holy Spirit

We may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations,

through Christ Our Lord, Amen. Alleluia!

[Readings: Deut. 4:32-34, 39-40; Psalm 33; Rom. 8:14-17; Matt. 28:16-20]

Celebrations, however much or little we express it, are vital to our experience of the joy of just being alive. It's how we demonstrate our gratitude to others, even to God, for being here. If we do not celebrate, do not feel or show or share our gratitude, then we may fall into a false sense of entitlement, even resentment, concerning what is given to us.

The celebration of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity is, as one theologian has described it, "an IDEA feast." Unlike Christmas or Easter or your birthday or the Fourth of July, nothing actually "happened" on a particular day to cause this feast. We aren't celebrating an occasion but a concept. So what's to celebrate?

Nearly every other day of the Church year is dedicated to some concrete event or some person. There are many feasts for Jesus, for Mary, for the saints, and for signature moments in the Gospel or the life of the Church.

We even celebrate the "Chair of Peter," which is the office of the pope. And the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, which is the "feast day" of a building used as the pope's cathedral in Rome. But when you study the Church calendar closely, it becomes clear that we have only a single day all year when we celebrate God, simply and purely -- just God in His Divine Self. That's today.

Today we acknowledge that there is much to cheer about, much to be grateful for, in our relationship with God. The Creator of all things, who is also the Savior and Redeemer, as well as the Spirit and Consolation of the Church, is literally all things to all people.



No one and nothing would be here without God. There would be no “here” here. There would be no one around to celebrate anything.

On this day, we celebrate not only the existence of God, but also the relationship that God chooses to have with us. God creates us. Saves us, and makes us holy. God brought us and everything into being out of love, rescues us from our worst moves and their ultimate consequences, and “makes us holy” -- that is, gives us the grace we need to become more like ourselves, the people we were made to be, in the image of the Holy One. Sin disfigures us. Grace restores us. God is love, as Saint John says, and love constantly calls the beloved to come home and celebrate.

Being human, we naturally get tangled up in the math when it comes to the Trinity. God is Three in One? Actually, to be precise, the Church teaches that God is One in Three, which is a much deeper mystery. No matter how you do the math, there’s always more than meets the eye with God.

God is One; that’s the great Jewish revelation to Moses, and the Trinity does not seek to replace that concept or to deny it. We see God’s “backside” in the divine passing, as Moses once did, catching God in dust and footprints left behind. Creation is one such lovely, breathtaking footprint.

The Incarnation of Jesus, in His life, death, and Resurrection, is another overwhelming passage of God. And the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church in you and in me is a third most exhilarating sign that God is present and moving among us. God is **one**: We know this in three ways.

Today's readings remind us of the mission and ministry of Moses and Jesus Christ and us. Today, Moses says farewell on Mt. Nebo as he witnesses the Chosen People migrate to the Promised Land. In today's Gospel, Jesus gathers His disciples around Him in Galilee before His Ascension with the command to become joyful missionary disciples.

While praying and preparing this homily, the one verse that caught my eye was "they worshiped, but they doubted." DOUBTED?! These disciples were with Jesus for three years. They witnessed dozens of miracles. They saw the Risen Lord defeat death and walk about them. And STILL "they doubted?" OY VEY!

But we have to remember that the Greek word for "doubt" is similar to "being on the fence." Not necessarily doubting or giving up on faith. When Jesus walked on water and commanded St. Peter to do the same, Peter was on the side of faith. When he began to falter and sink, he was on the other side of the fence. The same Greek word is used here. And doesn't it speak to our own faith some days? We are "on the fence." Some days our faith is strong, other days not.

The word "disciple" from the Greek is usually translated as "one who learns" as "students." But that same word also means "one person walking with another to go somewhere." Isn't that a great definition?

You are walking with someone else to go somewhere. To encounter Jesus. To meet Jesus. To follow Jesus. As disciples, we are very special to all of the Holy Trinity! Are you aware of living in a special love relationship with each Person of the Trinity?

Can you sit and chat with God as Father, God as Savior, and God as Holy Spirit? When you're feeling hurt, can you sit in the Father's lap and receive His comfort? When you're fighting temptation, can you feel the

strength of Jesus coming to your rescue? When you're worried or confused or struggling to have faith, are you aware of the Holy Spirit's gentle guidance?

Some say our Triune God is like a family. It is better today that God IS a family. Not Father, Mother and Child, but Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is a Holy Trinity of helpers, healers, strengtheners, and faith-builders. God wants you to live in the fullness of His divinity! God wants you to benefit from all that God is. So, with joy, we pray:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. AMEN!

“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” AMEN!

[Readings: Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time: 1 Peter 1:3-9; Psalm 111; Mark 10:17-27; Mass for Various Needs, #30 for Peace and Justice]

During the Civil War, Mrs. Lydia Bixby was around 60 or older, poor, lightly educated and careworn. She had married Cromwell Bixby, a shoemaker, in Hopkinton, Mass., on Sept. 26, 1826. They had at least six sons and three daughters before Cromwell died in 1854. Sometime before the Civil War, the family moved to the Dorchester section of Boston.

After the war broke out, five of her sons enlisted in Massachusetts regiments. Two or three sons died in battle, and two died from complications of illness while they were prisoners of war.

In September of 1864, Lydia Bixby climbed the steps of the Massachusetts Statehouse to visit Senator William Schouler in his office. She was just one of many anxious mothers and wives who thronged the Senator's anteroom seeking help. She came to apply for a widow's pension. She made her first known visit to Senator Schouler In October, 1862.

Senator Schouler then told Governor John Andrew of Mrs. Bixby's great loss. He then asked the War Department if President Abraham Lincoln could write a letter of condolence to the grieving widow. This letter was read by a senior officer in the Pentagon in Washington D. C. in the movie, "Saving Private Ryan" to the parents who lost four sons in the Second World War, and whose youngest son was sought and found in dangerous German territory and returned home. Hence, "Saving Private Ryan."

This is what the letter said. I think it's sentiment applies to any mother or father who has lost a son or daughter defending our country and our freedoms. Indeed, to anyone who has lost a loved one in battle. Or whose loved one returned from battle with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, or some catastrophic war injuries.

*From the Executive Mansion, Washington, Nov. 21, 1864.*

*Dear Madam,*

*I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.*

*I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.*

*I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of Freedom.*

*Yours, very sincerely and respectfully,*

*A. Lincoln.*

Eternal Rest grant unto them, O Lord. And let Perpetual Light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen. May their souls and all the souls of those killed in war, terrorist acts, violence, abuse, natural disasters, and fatal or catastrophic accidents rest in peace.

AMEN!

**Universal Prayer of the Faithful**

**Priest:** Let us pray for our brothers and sisters as they go forth with courage and determination to face the forces of violence, weapons of destruction and hearts filled with hate.

**RESPONSE:** LORD, HEAR OUR PRAYER.

**Deacon or Reader:**

For our President, Congress, Supreme Court and our political and military leaders that they may tirelessly seek peaceful settlements to international disputes; we pray to the Lord:

That the Lord may preserve the members of our Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard and Air Force from all harm; we pray to the Lord:

That even in war, we may keep clearly before us the defense of all human rights, especially the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; we pray to the Lord:

That the families, relatives and friends of our military members may be strengthened in this time of concern and anxiety; we pray to the Lord:

That the Lord may help families with men and women in the armed forces to cope with daily challenges in the absence of their loved ones; we pray to the Lord:

That our homeland will be preserved from violence and terrorism and that the nations of the world will seek to work together in harmony and peace; we pray to the Lord:

That the hearts of all men and women will be moved to pursue true peace and justice; we pray to the Lord:

That violence may be overcome by peace; that weapons of destruction may be transformed into tools of justice, and that hate may give way to true charity; we pray to the Lord:

That grateful for and inspired by those veterans who have given their lives for our country we may bravely face the challenges ahead, and for all who have died, including those we are remembering at this liturgy; we pray to the Lord:

For those we are remembering at this Mass, especially for all who gave up their lives for their fellow citizens, that we might live and be free; and for the special needs we mention in the silence of our hearts (pause), we pray to the Lord.

**Priest:** Lord God, Almighty Father,

creator of mankind and author of peace,  
as we are ever mindful of the cost paid for the liberty we possess.  
We ask you to bless the members of our armed forces.  
Give them courage, hope and strength.  
May they ever experience your firm support, gentle love and compassionate  
healing.  
Be their power and protector, leading them from darkness to light.  
To you be all glory, honor and praise, now and forever.  
Amen.