

SCREEN: hands holding gift

ME: What is the best gift

you ever received?

The best gift you ever received....

what was it?

Got something in mind?

What made it so special?

It probably had something to do with

the love of the person who gave it.

And I bet it was something that

surprised you; something unexpected,

maybe a little extravagant....

your best gift ever.

SCREEN: Living Stones main screen

WE: We've arrived at the final week of

our Living Stones message series.

When we speak of living stones, we're
talking about members of the Church;
disciples--you and I---
called to build the Kingdom of God.

Today is Pentecost;

the birthday of the Church.

The Bible readings told us that the
only way for the Church to grow

is by members seeing their faith as
a gift to be shared with others.

Let's discover how we do it today.

SCREEN: blank red background

GOD: For us, there's no surprise what
happened on Pentecost because
we've known the story our whole lives.

But like with any truly great story,

there are some surprises left.

Each week since Easter we've heard

what the Apostles did after

they received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But today, seven weeks later we finally

heard how the gift was handed to them.

Let me set the scene:

so it's 50 days since Jesus rose from the

dead, just 10 days after he ascended.

His final instruction was this, he said:

“stay in Jerusalem and wait for

the promise of the Father.

You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

I'm sure they were excited and anxious.

But probably a little fearful because

they had no idea what being

'baptized with the Holy Spirit' meant!

I'm sure they asked each other,

"What will this gift look like? Will it be

unexpected, surprising or extravagant?"

Surprise! It was all that and more.

Here's the Bible's description:

SCREEN: suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were.

**Then there appeared to them tongues
as of fire, which parted and came
to rest on each one of them.**

**And they were all filled with the
Holy Spirit and began to speak in
different tongues.**

What an incredible gift!

Could they have ever seen this coming?

Wind, noise, tongues of fire,

speaking different languages!

Wow, the best gift ever!

Totally surprising and unexpected.

But then, if you can believe it,

something even more amazing happened.

We heard what the Apostles did

with their present.

They burst forth from the Upper Room

out into the streets of Jerusalem,

and began telling others about Jesus.

Amazing!

They didn't keep the gift to themselves,
didn't say, *"this is great, but let's stay
in this room with our present."*

No, within seconds of receiving the
Holy Spirit, they were sharing it;
were preaching and teaching and
making disciples.

Three thousand were baptized that day.

Three thousand 'dead rocks' became
'living stones'.

The Church was born, it grew everyday,
and continues to grow.

SCREEN: blank red background

But as I said, there is a surprise in the
Pentecost story.

The story is not over; it's still unfolding,
because God is still giving His Spirit to His
children and telling them to keep sharing it.

YOU: You received the same Holy Spirit
the Apostles were given on Pentecost.

Same Spirit.

When you were baptized,

Christ gave you the gift.

And just like the Apostles,

your mission is to be a living stone,

to share the gift and to “*go make disciples.*”

With a material gift someone gives you,

if you decide to give it away it's gone.

But with spiritual gifts, the opposite is true.

When you share the gift of the Holy Spirit,

you're filled even more.

In fact, the only way to keep this gift
is to give it away.

The Apostles learned this incredible truth.

They recognized the power of this gift
and the Church grew.

Because they did, you are here now.

If they'd stayed in that Upper Room,
kept the Holy Spirit to themselves,

the Church would have died out within
one generation.

But because they shared it,

disciples can now be found everywhere.

As they had a choice to make, so do you.

You can either share the spiritual and

material gifts you have to build the Kingdom

or you can keep them to yourself.

But know this: kept to yourself,

your faith doesn't help anyone but you.

Kept to yourself, your faith doesn't help

anyone but you.

SCREEN: Living Stones main screen

Our series on Living Stones has been

building towards today's culmination.

We are asking the members of our parish

to renew their offertory support

for the coming year so our parish

can keep making disciples:

to give a present to the Church

on her birthday.

Last week every household received a

letter about the renewal along with

a pledge card and a brochure to help you

decide what your giving will look like.

SCREEN: Planned
Prioritized
Percentage
Progressive

We want all our members to embrace

these four P's when it comes to their

offertory support.

So first, your giving should be *planned*.

Your giving is not accidental or occasional;

you plan to give, your giving is intentional,
it's part of your budget.

Your giving should be a ***priority***,
your top priority.

So your gift to God comes first,
right off the top, before you decide
to do anything else with your money.

A few years ago our parish started

online giving.

We use a company called Faith Direct.

I give through Faith Direct.

It is the best way to make sure your giving is planned and prioritized.

How to decide what to give?

Your giving should be based on a ***percentage*** of what you have.

The Bible speaks of a 'tithe' or 10% as the standard for giving back to God.

Four years ago I started tithing to the parish.

For years I was just giving a set amount... \$20 a week.

Not bad, I thought.

But my salary as pastor is \$28,000.

I was only giving about 3% back to God.

Then I read a book on giving which said that the pastor can't ask his congregation to give what he's not willing to give.

In other words: lead by example.

I felt very convicted so I began tithing.

I don't share this to blow my own horn

but to let you know I really struggled with

my decision to tithe, thought

“I can’t give up 10% of my salary...

I won’t be able to pay my bills.”

But I haven’t struggled at all.

Just the opposite.

Financially I’m more blessed than ever.

I’m experiencing the truth that

God loves a cheerful giver.

So pick a percentage and give

to the church using that percentage.

And finally your giving should be

progressive,

meaning you increase your giving

as your income grows.

I increase my giving every year.

When Jesus gave the gift of the Holy Spirit

to his Apostles they knew it was something

to be shared to build the Kingdom of God.

Christ is asking you to do the same;

to be a living stone and give

so His Kingdom keeps growing.

A study on Church giving just came out

which reveals Catholics give to the church

with one of two attitudes:

SCREEN: help pay the bills OR

give to vision.

They either give to help the parish

pay it's bills OR they give to

the vision of the parish.

Help pay the bills or give to vision.

Helping to pay the bills is about

maintaining, keeping it going,

but not really about growing.

Help pay the bills, is the attitude of obligation, burden, not giving happily or generously.

It's basically, *"Tell me how much you need Father and I'll see what I can do to help you out."*

When someone gives to vision the attitude

is, *“I’m excited about what is happening
at my parish, I want to be part of this
and see us grow.*

Giving to vision is what it means to be a
living stone and embrace
the mission of the Church!

For many years at St. Pius we were in
maintenance mode.

And in maintenance mode nobody seemed to notice or care that hundreds of people just stopped showing up.

Our weekly attendance dropped 40% in the years from 2000-2008. *40%!*

We could have accepted this as inevitable... a slow steady decline, then death.

Lots of churches do.

But together we said 'no';

refused to accept this as God's will or

see ourselves as hopeless.

Four years ago we presented a vision of

what our parish needs to be about.

SCREEN: To form disciples who joyfully

live out the mission of Jesus Christ in

Bowie. -*SPX parish vision statement*

Our parish vision statement puts it very simply: make disciples in Bowie.

This is what we are about;

why our parish exists.

And the successes of recent years

could fill a book.

Lives changed forever right here at

St. Pius:

--children and families discovering faith

for the first time

--young people becoming disciples through

our middle school & high school ministries

--adults going deeper through small groups,

ministry, mission activities, adoration,

and our parish retreat program

--Bowie Bob and Barb welcomed back

--worship that is uplifting and engaging.

Dead rocks turned to living stones.

That's our vision.

That's the story of faith so far.

This Pentecost of 2017, won't you

help us continue the story? Amen. +

SCREEN: Living Stones main screen

At this time we will have our annual
offertory pledge renewal---

something we do every Spring.

If you did not bring your pledge card from

home, please take one now from the end of

your pew, along with a pencil,

and pass them down to anyone

who needs them. *(wait)*

The card asks if you to commit to our parish vision for the coming year.

On this card you can also request information about Faith Direct, our online giving, or increase your online giving.

I'll give you just a minute now to fill out the card. *(wait)*

At this time I ask our children to come forward to collect your pledge cards.

I'll put in my pledge card then invite you to bring your card forward.

Please hold your regular offering for a few more minutes.

(After)

Thank you!

I know that our faith in Jesus Christ is

the best gift ever.

May the Holy Spirit touch our hearts this

Pentecost so that as living stones,

we may share our faith.

Through us may God continue to renew

the face of the earth.