

# Homilies for the Journey

## *JOURNEY IN FAITH & GRACE*

### *Homilies, Rite of Sprinkling, Bulletin Announcements, and Prayers of the Faithful for the Easter Season Cycle B*

#### Index

<i>Introductory letter.....</i>	<i>page 1</i>
<i>Rite of Sprinkling .....</i>	<i>page 2</i>
<i>Easter Sunday.....</i>	<i>page 3</i>
<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter.....</i>	<i>page 8</i>
<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter .....</i>	<i>page 10</i>
<i>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter .....</i>	<i>page 14</i>
<i>5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter .....</i>	<i>page 17</i>
<i>6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter .....</i>	<i>page 19</i>
<i>7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter .....</i>	<i>page 22</i>
<i>Pentecost Sunday .....</i>	<i>page 25</i>

# *JOURNEY IN FAITH & GRACE*

April 2006

To the Priests and Deacons of the Diocese of Buffalo,

Soon the Church will be entering the Easter Season. Here in the Diocese of Buffalo as we celebrate Easter and the Easter sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, & Eucharist we do so amidst the practical concerns of the Strategic Planning Process. Many vicariates have already begun and are well into the phase of discussion among parishes that form a cluster. Some are still struggling to understand the rationale and fear the movement that is going to be spurred by the Strategic Plan. One thing is for certain: from large to small, from rich to poor, through city, suburb, and countryside all parishes are going to be affected by the planning process. Whether it is in re-allocation of clergy because of diminishing numbers or re-configuration of institutional structures, our experience of parish life is going to be different.

In order to assist the clergy and parishioners in understanding the planning process, and in order to see within this process the Easter message of ‘new life’ and ‘renewed mission’, a Rite of Sprinkling for the Easter Season and homilies for each Sunday of the Easter season, including Pentecost, are being offered for your use and adaptation. Along with the homilies are weekly bulletin announcements and prayers of the faithful based upon the readings of the day and the theme of the homily. The intention in offering you these prepared homilies, announcements, and prayers for the Easter season is to infuse a spirit of hope and vision into this time of cluster discussions. As disciples of the Risen One, the process which underlies our Journey of Faith & Grace operates under the paradigm of the resurrection. Results from that paradigm are not fears or regrets but assurance and a sure direction.

The homily for Pentecost Sunday integrates a litany at the end which illustrates the many transitional journeys in church history when individuals were called to trust in faith and grace. If you use this homily, please be aware of the involvement of the congregation, and please allow for this involvement to happen. Our Journey of Faith & Grace is energized by the mission of the Church as displayed in the Pentecost occurrence where the “gathered crowds were filled with the spirit.”

If you have any ideas or suggestions for resources or approaches to be pursued concerning the spiritual revitalization of the diocese, please feel free to contact Sr. Regina Murphy or any of the members of the Spiritual Revitalization Committee.

*Msgr. Len Biniszkiewicz*

*Mrs. Grace Jaworski*

*Fr. Czeslaw Krysa*

*Deacon Mike Lemieux*

*Mr. Alan Lukas*

*Sr. Rosa Mystica Niedda, O.S.F.*

*Sr. Mary Ellen Twist, R.S.M.*

*Fr. James Vacco, O.F.M. – Chairperson, Spiritual Revitalization Committee*

## **EASTER SEASON SPRINKLING RITE**

Prayer of Thanksgiving  
Over Water Blessed at the Easter Vigil

**(Presider)**

GOD OF LOVE AND MERCY,  
THROUGH THESE WATERS OF BAPTISM,  
YOU HAVE FILLED US WITH NEW LIFE AS YOUR VERY OWN CHILDREN.

**(All sing or say the following or other suitable acclamation.)**

BLESSED BE GOD.

FROM ALL WHO ARE BAPTIZED IN WATER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT,  
YOU HAVE FORMED ONE PEOPLE,  
UNITED IN YOUR SON, JESUS CHRIST.  
AND JOURNEYING TOGETHER IN FAITH AND GRACE.

BLESSED BE GOD.

YOU HAVE SET US FREE AND FILLED OUR HEARTS  
WITH THE SPIRIT OF YOUR LOVE,  
THAT WE MAY LIVE AND SERVE TOGETHER IN YOUR PEACE.

BLESSED BE GOD.

YOU CALL THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED  
TO ANNOUNCE THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST  
TO PEOPLE EVERYWHERE,  
AND TO FORM COMMUNITIES OF FAITH AND GRACE  
WHERE ALL ARE WELCOME.

BLESSED BE GOD.

ALL LOVING GOD, YOU HAVE CALLED US TO THIS CLEANSING WATER,  
THAT WE MAY SHARE IN THE FAITH OF YOUR CHURCH,  
CELEBRATING RENEWAL AND THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE.  
MAY THE MYSTERY OF OUR BAPTISM  
LEAD US ALL TO REBIRTH IN YOUR SPIRIT OF LOVE.  
WE ASK THIS THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD.

AMEN.

**Homily for  
Easter Sunday  
Cycle B**

(Acts 10: 34a, 37-43; Ps 118; Col 3:1-4 or 1Cor5:6b-8; Jn20:1-19)

**April 16, 2005**

*Then the other disciple went in...he saw and believed.*

The Gospels are full of these and similar statements:

*We have never seen anything like this!*

*Where did he get all this from?*

*He's only a carpenter's son.*

*Why does He speak that way?*

*What is this? A new teaching authority?*

*He's insulting our fathers, teachings.*

*They waited for a chance to trap him.*

Or in other words

Where did this come from?

How can he say that?

I've never seen anything like that before!

Now, what's he up to?

How's this? Prove it!

This was how some people responded to Jesus healing wounds, curing the sick, returning sight to the blind, proclaiming a year of liberation, releasing those bound, raising the dead, giving the bread of life.

Today, even on Easter Sunday, we hear Mary Magdalene's, desperate, love-filled cry: *They've taken him away! I don't know where he is.* And in the last sentence of the

Gospel, you could almost hear the Evangelist John moan at the disciples: *they did not yet understand the Scripture.*

Why does John, Jesus' beloved disciple, groan from within? He ran the fastest, arrived at the tomb first, waited and entered after Peter. Then, the one who arrived first went in, *saw and believed.* Yes he *saw and believed.* A great testimony of faith. The others still did not believe, John went in, second in line, he *saw **and** believed.*

The empty tomb witnessed to what the Scriptures had been saying all along *he had to rise from the dead.* The fact that Jesus HAD to die, die a shameful death, be rejected by every authority on earth, religious and political. It HAD to happen. He HAD to rise ***from the dead,*** yes, ***from the dead!*** As the Creed of the Apostles would later proclaim: *he descended into **HELL** and rose **from the dead!***

The evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke recounted the disciples saying in similar words: *That's impossible! We've lost everything. Never heard of anything like that before! Show me! Never saw anything like that before.* The Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke, say, for forty days Jesus met with the disciples and broke bread with them, showing them that the dead, the crucified, the rejected One ***was alive.*** Jesus was alive and he HAD to die, and then rise. *They had never heard anything like that before.*

Our Diocese has embarked on a journey, a *Journey of faith,* a *Journey of grace.* Up until now we really have never heard, or maybe didn't want to hear the fact that in ten years there will be 100 less priests in WNY; one hundred less for over 260 parishes. We never thought that the Church would need to downsize. Companies yes, businesses too, schools perhaps, but our parishes reorganize, merge, link, close? In our neighborhood most of us *really* never saw or heard of anything like that before. Even though we see the cross of violence and the demise of our cities, our schools, sometimes our own families.

The diocesan *Journey* calls us to run, to run fast, but not to run away. It calls us to run to the first place where death was expected to steal life away, the tomb of Jesus.

When our Diocese, priests, faithful, lay ministers, deacons, youth, seniors hasten to the tomb, perhaps we will *see and believe*, believe that Jesus is alive, that He breaks bread with us each Eucharist, that the Church can and will be reborn, maybe into something we have *never yet seen before!*

Why can I say this? Why do I believe this? Why is this true? It is the truth of the Gospel, the proclamation of the News which is Good: life only comes from death! Let us see that today, on Easter Sunday. Let's *see and believe!* *See and believe* as John did, even if we have to let others in first.

The Church, Christ's Mystical Body, sustained, fed, nourished and strengthened in **the breaking of the bread**, for over two hundred centuries of Easters has seen and believed that we rise from crises from the persecution of the martyrs, from centuries of heresies, from barbarian destruction, from doubt and fears within, from schisms of East and West, from the wars of Reformation, from religious conflicts, from scandals and disappointments. From all this we know that Jesus rises from the depths, and from winding cloths of his Jerusalem sepulcher.

Jesus rises yet again, from hearts that know: *giving life is life giving*. That giving means multiplying ten, one hundred, a thousand-fold. Jesus rises in a people, a church, a diocese who knows, experiences, and draws energy and meaning from a Body that has been broken, a bread that is broken, is given, and is distributed. When leftovers are collected they feed another multitude. Are we ready to give, so that Jesus can give us life, renew our life, inspire us with never ending faith and hope? The Catholic Church has responded throughout the centuries.

John saw all this and believed. He saw what he had never yet seen before.

## **BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT**

### **Christ is risen?**

Initially the disciples received this news with reluctance, even fear. Their Master was sentenced to death at a public trial. The capital city, the holy city of Jerusalem rejected him shouting and crying *Crucify him!* He was publicly executed as an enemy of the state and of the national religion. Most of his followers ran from this horrid spectacle: the scourging, the cross, the nailing, the piercing of the *King of the Jews*. They ran in shame. One betrayed, another denied knowing Him. Now He's risen!?

It took forty days plus, of conversations and appearances, forty days of breaking bread with Jesus, yes, plus the descent of the Holy Spirit to scatter their hearts' fear and calm their traumatized spirits. Only then would Peter begin to boldly proclaim in Jerusalem, *This Jesus, whom you crucified, is risen! He is Lord and the Christ!* (Acts 2:16)

### **He is risen indeed!**

And He continues to rise in His Body, the Church, as it courageously accepts the challenges of history. The *Journey of Faith and Grace* is today's challenge for our diocese. Christ is yet again to rise in us and we shall be his witnesses.

## **PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL**

Priest: Let all those Baptized into the death of Jesus rise, and raise prayers to heaven for the Church and the world.

Lector: That the news of the Resurrection may strengthen Holy Father, Pope Benedict, Bishop Kmiec, and all the priests who serve in our diocese.

Lector: That our diocese may courageously accept the call to Resurrection hope as it journeys through restructuring.



**Homily for  
the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Cycle B**

(Acts 4: 32-35; 1 John 5: 1-6; John 20: 19-31)

**April 23, 2006**

There is a poem about a king and a beggar. The poem has a strange twist to it. The king, in his travels meets a beggar, and asks him for a gift. The beggar thinks: “it would be far better for the king to give me a gift.” Nevertheless the beggar reaches into his sack of possessions and finds a kernel of corn. He gives it to the king. Later the king returns and presents the beggar with a kernel of Gold. The beggar then regrets that he didn’t give the king all he had. The poem, certainly makes a powerful statement.

It is not unusual for any of us to be hesitant about giving up our possessions when someone is seeking them, with no promise of what they are going to do with them. However, the faithful person, always believes some good will come by letting go of our possessions when a need arises.

Isn’t that the essence of our first reading ? The early Christians, thru their meeting together, come to be of one mind and one heart and decided to share their possessions. They entrusted everything to the apostles, so that the need of the community would be satisfied. This was part of their personal and communal Journey of Faith and Grace.

In our diocese during Phase 2 and now phase 3 of our Journey of Faith and Grace, like the apostles, our bishop, pastors and deacons are asking us to be of one mind and one heart about a precious possession; our parishes and other Catholic institutions. There is a great need in revitalizing our Catholic faith communities, throughout the diocese. We are understandably resistant about giving too much away, for fear of what will be left for our use and spiritual security.

The bishop, as head of the diocese, is asking each of us for a gift. The gift can be: a willingness to trust his decisions; it can be a loving attitude toward seeing our needs be

met; or it can be a leap of faith where we willingly give up what is familiar believing something far better will be returned to us to take care of our needs.

There are a multiplicity of obstacles in all of this that will not be solved by any amount of business acumen. Our obstacles will be solved more accurately by faith sharing and centering on Jesus. He is all important. Faith in him has to be greater than any faith community to which we now individually belong. We each have to appeal to the Holy Spirit to make truth of our journey more obvious, so we are able to move ahead with confidence. We all have a plan in our head, but we have to be seeking the Lord's plan for us. The Spirit is urging all of us, bishop, priests, deacons, religious and laity to perceive that plan for more vibrant Catholic communities where worship and ministry call the Catholic communities to more active life.

The Lord will give us his peace and the ability to bolster our faith. We will have a clear understanding and direction in which to move. He did it for Thomas and he will do it for us.

We have all "received the Holy Spirit." God has breathed his life into us. We should be able to come to intelligent, peaceful, deeply spiritual decisions.

Let doubts, anxieties, confrontations and suspicions be far from us as we journey together on this Journey of Faith and Grace. The spirit is urging everyone of us to be part of the journey. This is a moment in our chapter of diocesan Catholic history to contribute something we can gratefully and faithfully pass on to those who follow our example. "Peace be with you."

#### **BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT**

Do you see yourself as a Spirit filled person ? If so appeal to the Holy Spirit to give you His wisdom to share with your sisters and brothers on this Journey of Faith and Grace. We are all companions on the journey. We need to help each other come to a better understanding of how we will live our Catholic faith in the future. Find joy in what we share.

## **PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

That we would renew our gift of the Holy Spirit. When God breathed his life into us, so might we reflect his wisdom in the gift we decide to share, we pray to the Lord.....



## **Homily for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter Cycle B**

(Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19; Psalm 4: 2, 3, 7-9; 1 John 2: 1-5; Luke 24: 35-48)

**April 30, 2006**

If you're a fan of the television show, Law and Order, you know that every episode begins with a homicide. After the murder is reported the top detectives assigned to investigate the crime spend the first half-hour of the episode interviewing witnesses and gathering the necessary forensic evidence to bring the person or persons to justice. In between the arrest and the trial, the show's second half-hour deals with the prosecution's ability to build a criminal case. The defense and the prosecution attorneys individually examine the evidence, research case law, interview witnesses, and determine trial strategies. Once the trial begins, the prosecution and the defense attorneys call witnesses to the stand to offer their emotional testimony. When the attorneys are finished presenting their case, the judge instructs the jury to begin their deliberations to decide upon a verdict.

No matter if it's an episode of Law and Order, or a real court of law, the material evidence and the credibility testimony of witnesses ultimately define the merits of the case. The interviewing of witnesses, the research of case law and the strategy building sessions that takes place between the discovery of the crime and actual trial is crucial to the trial's outcome.

Today's Gospel begins the night of the resurrection, with the Emmaus disciples returning to the Upper Room to give their eye-witness accounts of seeing the risen Jesus. In the middle of their testimony Jesus suddenly appears and offers himself as evidence that he is

alive. He is keenly aware of the startled and frightened looks on their faces. As proof that he lives, He invites the disciples to touch him and to inspect his hands and feet. He even asks for food to prove that he is no ghost. Jesus then takes the opportunity to offer some instruction affirming the prophecy of his passion, as explained in scripture. He reminds them of “all that has been written about him in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and that the psalms must be fulfilled.” He opens their minds to understand all the things that have been written. Although, we are not privy to the exact scriptures that are fulfilled, Jesus apparently provides them with the much needed research and “case law” that will assist them to bear witness and preach to the nations His message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. And Jesus then instructs the disciples that they are to start their ministry with Jerusalem, the site of his passion, death and resurrection.

Jesus’ timely appearance reminds us that we are in-between the Resurrection and the Ascension . The disciples, too, are experiencing some in-between moments. They are starting to come to grips with the good news that Jesus has risen from the grave and to a new awareness of what is to come. Their emotions range between shock and incredulous joy. The disciples are in-between receiving further lessons and instructions and the great commission to go out and baptize and preach to the nations a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. This in-between time is a critical time in the lives of the disciples.

Jesus knows that before the disciple can begin their ministries to preach to the nations, they still needed a little more training, and a better sense of the evidence concerning his divinity. They need to understand the prophecies and the law, and they needed a little more confidence in order to give an eye-witness account of what they saw and heard, before beginning their journeys. Jesus is preparing his advocates for building the Kingdom here on earth.

The diligent work that attorneys do to prepare for a trial, and the hard work that the disciples accomplished before their missionary journeys bears a great deal of resemblance to the work that is being accomplished by the *Journey in Faith and Grace* process. Without a doubt, some people have taken positions on both sides of the aisles to prosecute and defend the process. The Diocese has provided sufficient evidence and research for building its case for change. Through a variety of different strategies, the

parishes have given testimony to their viability of sustaining parish life and have submitted their completed evaluation reports to the Vicariates for review. What's next? For the time being we enter into an anxious time of "in-between."

As we await the final decisions regarding the status of our churches, we need to fill this in-between time with prayer: the *Journey in Faith and Grace* prayer to be exact. The Vicariate clusters are in the process of examining, discussing, defending, even offering various plea bargaining options in order to arrive at new models for making vibrant parishes within the Diocese of Buffalo. Linking and merging churches, developing shared ministries, and the consolidation of business operations is a very laborious process that will take a great deal of deliberations. It might be advisable for all us to exercise a little patience during this time of deliberation.

This period of in-between is a good opportunity to take a temperature reading of our own individual emotions and attitudes towards the process. For example, are we still vacillating between frustration and anger, or are we moving toward acceptance that parish life as we know it will change? Even though decisions between moving-out and moving-in still need to be made, do we still believe that our church will not be affected by the process? Whatever our attitude is concerning *Journey in Faith and Grace*, it is important to keep Jesus in the middle of the "in-between."

Just as Peter proclaimed the goodness of Christ in the first reading, the Church of Buffalo is calling each of us to bear witness to the goodness of our Catholic life and the importance of sustaining vital parishes. Jesus is in the middle of our process and he encourages us to offer compelling testimony to the times in which we live (the Prophecies); to value the lessons of scripture, and to have faith and the confidence to believe "that God will hear us when we call upon him in prayer." St. John reminds us in the second reading that we are to speak and act in a way that demonstrates our knowledge and understanding of Christ. We are to speak and act in a way that invites and welcomes our sisters and brothers to join us at the table of the Lord.

To be an advocate and a witness for our faith in Christ is an awesome responsibility, but it can also bring much trepidation. The disciples did not let fear keep them from their

mission, and neither should we. Let's continue to call upon the Holy Spirit, the great advocate, to help us to build stronger and more vibrant worshipping communities in the months to come.

### **BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT**

In today's gospel, the risen Jesus presents himself to the disciples, opens their minds to all that is written about him in scripture, and then commissions the disciple to bear witness to all of the events they have seen by going out to the nations preaching a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. We, too, are asked to be an advocate and a witness for Christ. But sometimes our own emotions and attitudes get in the way of carrying out this mission. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit, the great advocate, will help us to set aside our individual needs and emotions that might hinder the way building of stronger and more vibrant worshipping communities in the Diocese of Buffalo, through *Journey in Faith and Grace*.

### **PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

That the Holy Spirit, the great Advocate, will help us to set aside our individual needs and emotions that might hinder the process of building stronger and more vibrant worshipping communities, through *Journey in Faith and Grace*.



**Homily for  
the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Cycle B**

(Acts 4: 8-12; Psalm 118; 1 John 3: 1-2; John 10: 11-18)

**May 28, 2006**

Remember the nursery rhyme: “Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb. Mary had a little lamb with fleece as white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went, Mary went, Mary went; everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go.” Cute nursery rhyme for sure. Simple nursery rhyme. Not really complex, but it sure does have a lot of repetition. And in a nursery rhyme there is a reason for repetition. A young child obtains their basic language skills from musical rhythms. There is something in the developing brain of a child that seems to be able to learn things much easier if there is a rhythm in the sound. Words and ideas are absorbed much quicker if there is a rhythm and musical beat to the sound. Thus the repetition of a nursery rhyme is a device which attracts and gains the attention of the child. It likewise soothes the child and makes the child feel secure and happy. This rhythm within the rhyme is one way to effectively establish familiarity and trust between the singer & the child.

In today’s Gospel Jesus identifies himself as the “Good Shepherd.” He speaks of how the sheep recognize him. What do sheep recognize ? It seems that in the ancient practice of sheep herding herders would corral their sheep together for protection. When the particular shepherd wished to gather his sheep he would let out with a particular clicking or whistle sound. When the sheep were young lambs the shepherd would condition the lambs to recognize him by the repetition of this clicking sound. Thus, when the sheep were placed in a common herd, when the Shepherd wished to gather his sheep he would emit this sound and they would come toward him. They trusted the sound because they knew it was from the one who would lead them to fresh pastures and waters. The sheep don’t cognitively reflect on the nature of the Shepherd, they just trust that the sound of the Shepherd will lead them to more vibrant pastures.

Oh, if shepherding in the church was as simple as a nursery rhyme. If shepherding the Church was as clear and decisive as caring for a flock of passive, dependent sheep which just move from pasture to pasture as the shepherd deemed fit. Thank God it isn't !!

The good reality is that the sheep called the Church community is an educated and hearty flock. It is a flock that seeks accountability from their shepherds, the bishops, priests, deacons, parish staffs; and earnestly desires to hear the voice of its primary shepherd-Jesus Christ and to follow his signal of establishing his priorities in the world. Those priorities that speak of forgiveness, love, fellowship, community, and peace. Priorities that beckon from us justice, service, and good stewardship. The signal our primary Shepherd Jesus emits is a signal that calls forth from us a response that is not centered in the past but always looks to the future, not with apprehension but with trust and confidence.

At this time in the life of our diocesan church we are being led on a journey of faith & grace. We are being asked at this time to assess our pasture and the neighboring pastures to find how can we till the terrain so as to make it not only hospitable for the flock but resourceful enough to handle the tasks we are called to undertake as we cooperate in the building of a just and righteous world, where there are no black sheep but where all find welcome, support, and the presence of God.

In order to be faithful sheep we are called to trust our shepherds and each other. We are asked to dialogue and develop prospects that move us beyond parochialism to a universal sense of identity and to the mission of the primary Shepherd – Jesus. We all must realize that as the strategic plan takes shape and starts to become clearer there will be all kinds of adjustments and changes. There will be many things that will be different. No parish or institution in the diocese is going to be unaffected. Large parishes to small parishes will need to re-orient themselves to a new understanding of parish structure and leadership. More leadership roles will be undertaken by well trained members of the faithful who are not part of the clergy. Resources, from revenues to holdings, will need to be banded together. All these things are inevitable at this point in time if the Church of Buffalo is to

be able to respond to the call of the primary Shepherd – Jesus in a way that is effervescent, proactive, and always provocative.

Mary might have had a little lamb, but if we really trust each other, dialogue constructively with each other, make our efforts focused on the voice of Jesus who beckons us to creative engagement in the building of his reign in our midst, we will surely become a might band and go forward strongly, in making pastures where we and others can most surely grow.

### **BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT**

Jesus is the good shepherd who calls us to follow. His call is one which summons us beyond our zones of familiarity to take on ever new and proactive tasks. Our local shepherd and successor to the Apostles, Bishop Edward Kmiec, is asking us to follow the Journey of Faith & Grace in establishing a more vibrant diocese. The journey and its tasks are complex and at times arduous. But if we keep in mind that the primary Shepherd – Jesus Christ – promised never to abandon us but always to guide our sincere attempts and assist us in our discernments, then new pastures will be tilled in the Diocese of Buffalo and we will together strengthen the bonds that forge us to be the Church, the people of God.

### **PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

For the Church of Buffalo as we Journey in Faith & Grace, may we objectively listen, faithfully respond, and confidently discern the new and vibrant pastures where growth, mutual cooperation, and the priorities of the Gospel can take hold, we pray to the Lord.....



**Homily for  
the 5th Sunday of Easter  
Cycle B**

(Acts 9: 26-31; 1 John 3: 18-24; John 15: 1-8)

**May 14, 2006**

Whether you have vineyards in your garden, orchards in the fields or roses on the front lawn, it is a known fact that in order to allow new growth to develop and flourish, you need to prune and cut back the old growth that has stopped producing the fruit of the plant, be it grapes or apples, pears or roses. There is always a need for trimming the branches so that the fruit that does grow will be healthy, hardy and abundant.

Jesus beautifully uses this analogy of pruning to help us understand our own relationship to him and our responsibility for continual growth. He is the vine and we are the branches. We recognize our dependency on him to sustain us with his word and the Eucharist. We attend Mass and get involved with the various parish functions, but we also are called to show new growth in our personal lives that expresses itself and is lived out in our parish communities.

In order for each of us to produce new growth, we need to look to see what is it in our lives that represents old growth that has hardened our own ability to respond to his message of love and peace in our lives. What old assumptions and ways of thinking and acting keep us from growing and responding; what old prejudices or lingering hard feelings keep us from producing the fruit that Jesus invites us to bear.

Our *Journey in Faith and Grace* offers all of us in the Church of Buffalo the opportunity to ask ourselves those same questions about our diocese. It gives us an opportunity to look into ways to prune that will produce abundance. We are given this opportunity to look to the ways that we can become more fruitful, and in the process, glorify God.

Personal introspection can be difficult and challenging on its own, but to embark on a diocesan-wide effort of renewal brings with it the challenge that everyone needs to set aside personal desires and look toward the greater good of strengthening our Catholic faith communities in the diocese of Buffalo.

But Jesus tells us that doing this, by bearing fruit and being his disciples, we glorify God. He reminds us that when we stay connected to him, when we remain in him, our prayers and petitions for new and revitalized growth are brought before God and we can be assured of a new springtime filled with the fruit of our efforts. So during this season of resurrection and rebirth, we can all make this journey of faith and grace together, committed to being ever more fruitful branches on the vine that is Christ.

#### **BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT**

In today's Gospel we hear that by bearing fruit and being his disciples, we glorify God. Jesus reminds us that when we stay connected to him, when we remain in him, our prayers and petitions for new and revitalized growth are brought before God and we can be assured of a new springtime filled with the fruit of our efforts. We can all make the plan of the Journey of Faith and Grace together, causing a new growth through our continued commitment to being ever more fruitful branches on the vine that is Christ.

#### **PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

That our *Journey in Faith and Grace* will provide a process of continual growth and nourishment for our parish communities.. We pray to the Lord.



**Homily for  
the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Cycle B**

(Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; 1 John 4: 7-10; John 15: 9-17)

**May 21, 2006**

“What can stop these people who have received the Holy Spirit?”.....

The faith of the early Church, as recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles*, is really amazing! The very realization of the presence and activity of the Spirit of Jesus, so alive among them in their faith community, empowered them to be transformed in their attitudes and their actions. Nothing could stop them!

How do we see ourselves today as the descendents and followers of this little band of believers? At times, like the present, we are up against some of the same difficulties they confronted. The world itself stretches us to see everyone as God’s beloved children. Even our city and county predicaments challenge our acceptance of reality and the good will of our neighbors. Our diocese, as well as others around the country, mirroring our civil society, is confronted with the need to change. Are we stopped in the face of these challenges? Are we trusting enough to gently dismantle structures made by human hands which truly have served us so well for generations? Have we yet to be amazed at the power of the Spirit among us?

Today’s first reading witnesses to Peter’s newly confirmed faith as he proclaims the good news to Cornelius’ family and friends. We know that Peter himself, as well as the first followers of Jesus who were of Jewish origin, had struggled long and hard with the issue of the Gentiles becoming Christians without first being circumcised. Just imagine Peter standing before these people, saying ,

I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality.  
Rather, the person of any nation who fears God and acts uprightly  
is acceptable to God.

Peter admitted that he was “beginning to see”. However, he had not even finished these words when the Holy Spirit descended upon all who were listening, even the Gentiles. Everyone, including the Jews among them, were amazed that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on Gentiles who were speaking in tongues, glorifying God.

The Christian community, still in its infancy, began to “think outside the box”, to recognize that God was among them in a most powerful but very new way. Their faith and trust grew strong, empowering them to face many obstacles and the Good News of Jesus’ risen life spread far and wide. Through the waters of Baptism many followers were added to the community.

Soon observers of this phenomenal band of believers remarked on their spirit of love and support of one another through service and personal sacrifice and noted that even more were added to their number. This growing community of faith displayed a new and different attitude, one that was welcoming of the stranger, accepting of diverse cultures and customs.

The selection from the First Letter of John expresses the faith and grace of this growing Christian community as it describes their understanding of the love of God in their lives, the very hallmark of their unity. God’s love shows no partiality.

Does this passage reflect our parish community’s attitude? Has fear of change yet given way to acceptance and eagerness for the newness awaiting us? We are also invited to love one another and to share this love among all those who are in need in the faith community of the Diocese of Buffalo. God is calling us to remember that the message of love is to be applied over and over again, generation after generation, just as God’s love for us is constant, unconditional and without end.

Our *Journey in Faith and Grace*, embarked upon with our strong tradition of faith and grace, no different than that known by Peter and the early Christian community, can be our opportunity to grow in the awareness of God’s powerful love among us, strong enough to amaze us with new life, new creativity, renewed energy and new members choosing new life.

John's Gospel message of God's love for us and the many accounts down through the centuries of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit among us, is the legacy of our community today. We are founded on God's unconditional love for all people, grounded in Jesus' intimate friendship with us, experienced in prayer and sacrament within the Church community and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live daily the commandment to love as God loves us.

Let us keep our eyes and ears open to signs of the Holy Spirit among us. Let us rejoice in the faith and grace of Baptism celebrated anew in our Sunday Eucharist especially in this Easter Season. Let us be amazed at the new life already taking hold in our hearts.

### **BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT**

The readings for today invite us as a community to emulate God who shows no partiality toward any persons and who loves all as daughters and sons of God. Based on this truth, are we as a parish, who follow Jesus' example, open to the *Journey in Faith & Grace* which has the capacity to stretch us beyond our imaginings? Co-operating with God's greater design for the church in our diocese, may we be a community of believers who are open to participating in a new vision for our parish and diocese.

### **PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

As a people of God who continue the strategic plan of *Journey in Faith & Grace*, may Jesus' message of love inspire us to live as lovers of all God's people, we pray to the Lord...



**Homily for  
the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Cycle B**

(Acts 1: 15-26; Psalm 103; 1 John 4: 11-16; John 17: 11b -19)

**May 28, 2006**

In homiletics class I was told: “The first 30 seconds are the most important. In that first 30 seconds three things can happen:

1. you engage the congregation or loose them
2. you spark inquisitiveness in the congregation or induce the status quo
3. you open the door to fresh direction or close the shades for bobbing sleep.

Remember the words of the message will only be as powerful as the delivery of them.”

Technique and style are important factors in communicating. But, putting aside oratorical techniques for a moment, let’s evaluate the first 30 sections of Jesus’ words in the Gospel today. First, he calls God – ‘Father.’ Then he states that we possess God’s ‘name.’ He then reminds us of his ‘protection.’ Finally he announces a testament, a heartfelt rationale for his prayer and his life: ‘sharing joy completely.’ Jesus calls, we possess; Jesus reminds, we share.

Jesus calls and reminds us of a reality that at times alludes us because of our preoccupations with our shortfalls and whirlwind of issues; that there is a truth that more clearly defines our way in life. That truth is that the Divine Presence pervades us with a consciousness and a conscientiousness.

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles the body of believers are very conscious of Judas’ betrayal. Yet they know they must not stay absorbed in those past events but to conscientiously remember, make real, that which is quite important: “The witnessing of the Resurrection of Jesus.” This consciousness and conscientiousness empowers them to address the status quo by the mighty and transforming outcome of the

resurrection – a life infused with love. Those absorbed by this are consecrated in a truth: “That God is love and whoever remains in God remains in love and God in them.”

Possessing this realization we can announce joy, even when things seem a bit grim and uncertain. The joy we announce is not superficial or imaginary. It is a joy that is able to supersede narrow horizons to look beyond, by faith, to new constructs. It as well empowers us to “hope” in the new constructs. As seen in the first reading from Acts, the early Church did not spend a lengthy time in despairing the betrayal by Judas, nor did they feel disconnected from Jesus’ mission. The event of the resurrection prompted that early body of believers to shape the future and take charge to form their future in conjunction with others who share the values & principles learned from their rabbi and Lord, Jesus Christ. There is a confidence that rises from this that made them, and can make us, realize that God as Father is the initiator through us of a new era with a much enriched Kingdom.

Does this just happen or does it take some collaboration on our part? Circumstances and events affect us. Time and cultural swings influence us. Yet we possess and share such an element of intimacy with our God that we never need to feel that all that we know is being contorted. We possess a share in the life of the Risen Christ. We are his body. Thus we shape the future along the important designs of our principle focus: Love of God, Love of each other through Jesus Christ. The structures will change, the system will be spent; but the delivery of the Good News of Jesus Christ and his kingdom will never go away.

The first 30 seconds of today’s Gospel clarifies further the role each of us must play in the Journey in Faith & Grace. We must be people steeped in a loving trust in God’s providence. We must be engaged in the process, not by protecting former systems or what we perceive as ageless places, but by being protected by the divine energy that calls us beyond our zones of comfort and familiarity. We must be enraptured by the search to make our ancient traditions ever newly expressed to generations of people still to come. We must not be afraid to face change, modification and adjustment for the greater good.

Opening the door of the future may mean we must move the doorway from facing the alley and move it to the unfinished side of the house where it may not be as cozy because of the exposure. But if the life, death & resurrection of Jesus as taught us anything it is that we find our comfort in the uncomfortable and challenging. We learn to adjust because what is the central foundation of the message and our essence of joy is “Loving God and Loving each other through Jesus Christ.” We deliver that by our joyful witness to sacrifice for the sake this elemental truth.

In the first 30 seconds of leaving this place of worship are we going to live in a way that sets the course of engaging the people that we are: God’s people ? Are we asking the questions of how we can better love as God has loved ? Are we open to say that in this passing world, as St. Paul says, there only three things that are lasting; Faith, Hope, And Love, and the greatest of these is “love ?”

We are called to deliver the message consciously and conscientiously. Our Journey in Faith & Grace calls us to openly and intentionally do that. And if we do it well we will keep vibrant and properly focused; we will be consecrated in truth.

### **BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT**

Truth is an important value and virtue. But many times the truth of things, or about ourselves, scares us to the point of fighting change. Yet people not afraid of the truth are able to grow, prosper and be enriched. The Journey in Faith & Grace calls each of our parishes, vicariates, and the diocese as a whole to face certain truths. Yet, as we face the statistical truths, as we deal with practical implications, can we also be energized by the truth of God’s providence in these areas and our call to master God’s providence through the principal Christian virtue of love ?

### **PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL**

As this parish and our diocese continue the strategic plan of Journey in Faith & Grace, may truth guide us in ways that make our delivery of love more bountiful, solid, and encompassing, we pray to the Lord.....

**Homily for  
The Solemnity of Pentecost  
Cycles ABC**

(Acts 2:1-11; Ps 104; 1Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23)

**June 4, 2006**

*(NOTE HOMILIST - This homily for Pentecost Sunday contains a litany as its conclusion. The litany involves and is divided among the lector, congregation, and homilist (presider). Even though the homily concludes with introducing the congregation's response during the litany, you may prior to the beginning of delivering the homily want to inform the people of the litany and that their response is: "Send the Spirit to u now.)*

Homily with participatory litany within

After Jesus' pain-filled suffering and public execution the apostles, those who had followed the Lord, were afraid they may share His fate. Even though, the first verses of Acts, and the last section of each and every Gospel tell us Jesus met His disciples over a period of forty days. Many a time, He broke bread with them, showed them his hands and his side, cooked breakfast for them on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, tried to calm their fears, and even commissioned to them to spread this Good News to the world. Filled with anxiety, the disciples locked themselves in the Upper Room with His Mother. They hid in the room of the Last Supper, in the same He appeared to them time after time after Rising from the dead.

They knew Jesus had risen, they talked with him, He gave them a mission, yet they were anxious, fearful, apprehensive. Did they lack the strength, the desire, the vision to go to the *whole world*? Did they think it impossible, unattainable, unrealistic or just beyond their capabilities? Were they overwhelmed? All they could do was pray together in a locked room.

And into the womb of prayer, that sacred place of anxious waiting, God sent the Holy Spirit. That wind and fire caught their breath and inflamed their hearts, their tongues, and purified their lips. Leaving the locked room, the Church was born in Jerusalem and reached the ends of the earth.

They unlocked the door. They left that room, once cowardly and fainthearted, now empowered by the wind of God's breath and on fire with a News not many had yet heard and others had feared. On that day 3,000 were baptized. From there, their voices went out to all the world.

For two thousand years, time and time again, the Church has found herself in a dark room, locked, and afraid. When the prayers of the saints saturated those walls to a bursting point, the Spirit descended again and again filling it with a fresh wind, a blazing fire, bursting open the doors for believers to take on a Jesus' mission, reforming and renewing in that same Good News, around the eternally broken bread of unending life.

Here are some of those crucial, yet momentous moments. Imagine the power of the Spirit filling and renewing the Body of Christ each time. Let us now beg the Spirit, as one, that our *Journey in faith and grace* be yet another of those vibrant, creative, and life-giving moments for our entire diocese. Listen and pray, and let us respond in this litany we will now pray, as well as throughout our lives, with: **“Send the Spirit to us now”**

### **Litany:**

Lector: Holy God, on that day of Pentecost there were gathered Medes, Egyptians, Arabs, Jews, and Romans.  
As you sent your Spirit then,

People: ***Send the Spirit to us now,***

Priest: One Church in time and eternity.



Lector: Paul in his zeal would not change and was knocked off his high horse.  
As you sent your Spirit then,

People: ***Send the Spirit to us now,***

Priest: One Church in time and eternity.



Lector: The first century Council of Jerusalem struggled with Christians who could not accept others.  
As you sent your Spirit then,

People: *Send the Spirit to us now,*

Priest: One Church in time and eternity.



Lector: Loving Father, for three hundred years Christianity struggled and then came the Edict of Milan, giving the Church freedom of worship.  
As you sent your Spirit then,

People: *Send the Spirit to us now,*

Priest: One Church in time and eternity.



Lector: Immortal God, from 500 AD to 1200 AD some people thought your Church gave in to the world and politics, and you sent Benedict, Leo the Great, the Abbot Anthony, Bernard to challenge and reform.  
As you sent your Spirit then,

People: *Send the Spirit to us now,*

Priest: One Church in time and eternity.



Lector: Holy God, during the Middle Ages Francis of Assisi responded to your call of: “Rebuild My Church;” during the Reformation Ignatius of Loyola sought to correct error and make known the truth of your reign.  
As you sent your Spirit then,

People: *Send the Spirit to us now,*

Priest: One Church in time and eternity.



Lector: Mighty God, after the journey of Columbus your faithful people came from many lands to this land. Along with them you sent saints, Frances Cabrini, Junipero Sierra, Isaac Jogues; and to Western New York, John Neumann. From among the people of this new world us you called forth

Kateri Tekakawitha, Elizabeth Ann Seton, Katherine Drexel, Marianne Cope, and here in this diocese Nelson Baker, faithful who responded freely and willingly to the changing circumstances and needs of their time. As you sent your Spirit then,

*People: Send the Spirit to us now,*

*Priest: One Church in time and eternity.*

### **BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT**

**From that first Pentecost day in Jerusalem,** the Holy Spirit has been inflaming faith and inspiring hope in every age. As the Apostles left the Upper Room, the Spirit worked in and through them, spreading the Gospel to the four corners of the globe. The Holy Spirit enlivens the Church with renewed enthusiasm and life in every age. The Holy Spirit is the Church's renewing force. Through the Spirit, Paul was knocked off his horse and changed direction. The Spirit is the strength of the martyrs, the light through the turbulence of persecution, the holy wisdom of the saints, like Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, Theresa, Elizabeth, Bonaventure, and many others. The Paraclete is the courage of our sainted heroes: Joseph, Martin, Maximilian Kolbe, Thomas More, Stanislaus, John Vianney, and a host of others. Now is the time for us to ask the Lord for the same light, docility, wisdom, courage and strength of the Holy Spirit for all the members of the Church at Buffalo as we *Journey in faith and grace*. ***Come Holy Spirit and renew the face of the earth! As you sent your Spirit then, send the Spirit to us now, one Church in time and eternity.***

### **PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

Lord, send down you Holy Spirit upon the leaders and faithful of the Diocese of Buffalo. Renew our visions and remove all that hinders the spread of your Good News. Let us pray to the Lord.