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Saint Bernard Church
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OWNING OUR CONFIRMATION

If we put ourselves in the place of the disciples at the time Jesus was here on earth, we would see pretty quickly that following Jesus was a real roller-coaster ride.

For example, the disciples would have been saddened but also bewildered by His crucifixion and death. Jesus was all-powerful. Why would He have allowed Himself to be abused, spat upon, tortured and killed? What would they do without Him?

Then they would have been overjoyed by His resurrection, but at the same time they didn't seem to ever know when He was going to show up or whether they would even recognize Him when He did.

And today we celebrate His ascension into heaven. The disciples would have been happy for Jesus that He would rejoin His Father. However, they would have wondered again how they would function without Him. Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit, but they would not have been sure what the Holy Spirit would do for them.

Jesus is quoted in today's First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles as saying "In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" and "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." Again, the details of what this meant would have been a mystery to the disciples.

I think it's probably true that the Holy Spirit is a mystery to most of us as well.

How many of us have received the sacrament of Confirmation, when we received the Holy Spirit?

What difference has our Confirmation made in our lives? In what ways have we experienced the power of the Holy Spirit?

Have we taken ownership of our Confirmation? Have we made an adult decision to ask and expect the Holy Spirit to intercede in our lives?

The role of the Holy Spirit is to continue and sustain the work of Jesus in the lives of the first disciples and in our lives, too.

The Holy Spirit is a guide, communicating God's will to each of us.

The Holy Spirit is the maestro, like the conductor of an orchestra, linking the thoughts and actions of Christians together to build up the Body of Christ on earth.

And, as Jesus says in today's First Reading, we will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. Divine power. Supernatural power. The power to heal, to preach, to forgive sins, to change people's lives.

Every one of us who has been confirmed has received the Holy Spirit. As Saint Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:7, "To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit."

What have we done with this gift? What should we expect?

The best example is in the Acts of the Apostles, the book of the Bible that describes the earliest Christian communities. After Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples, the community experienced miraculous healings, powerful preaching.

It's faith was so alive, so contagious, that thousands were added to the community every day.

The Acts of the Apostles was never intended to be simply an historical account. Its fundamental purpose was to let all Christians know the potential that exists when we invite the Holy Spirit to animate our lives with His presence and His gifts.

So what should we do?

First, we should pray, in our own words, asking the Holy Spirit to come to us, to guide us, to inspire us, to empower us.

Then we need to make an act of surrender, giving control of our lives to the Holy Spirit and promising to be faithful and obedient to Him.

This means we have to be detached from our own will, giving the Holy Spirit to do with us whatever He wants. As Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:8:

"The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

In every situation we are in every day of our lives, we need to realize that the Holy Spirit has put us there for a reason. This means we have to be prayerful, attentive and willing to do whatever the Holy Spirit prompts us to do.

If we live like this, not a single day of our lives will be boring.

Here's an example of how the Holy Spirit works.

My wife and I moved to upstate New York in 2008. By early 2013, my wife Connie began to think it was time to move back to Tulsa. We talked about it, and I proposed that we table that decision for a year, adding the words "unless something unusual comes up." Connie agreed.

A couple of weeks later, on a Thursday night, we got a text message on Connie's phone which read: "Car dealer ministry opportunity available. Call me. Rich."

Even though I had been inclined to stay in New York, I immediately realized that the opportunity described in the text message was unusual, so I would have to check it out.

The owner of a car dealership in Tulsa was a good Catholic man. He wanted a part-time chaplain to provide support for his 250 employees. It was clear to me that the Holy Spirit had orchestrated this whole thing, so back to Tulsa we went. And in doing so, we experienced many amazing blessings.