

Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord

With these words we receive our commission at the end of Mass. The priest or deacon dismisses the congregation, telling us to leave the confines of the Church, and to go out into the community and by and through our lives, live out the values which the gospel, the good news has expressed. On Friday this coming week, eighteen of our young parishioners will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and I would encourage as many of you as possible to come along to Mass and support them with your presence.

Today is the Feast of the Ascension and it is as if the words of Jesus spoken to the disciples in today's gospel are being directed to our youngsters: *And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then until you are clothed with the power from on high.* It would be difficult to find a more appropriate sentence to describe the sense of expectancy that the coming of the Holy Spirit conveys. I hope that the gifts of the Spirit will bring them to an appreciation of the power of their faith as an active presence in the lives.

In our talks together we've tried to apply the sometimes rather abstract concept of the 'gifts of the Spirit' into practical and recognisable moments when such gifts come into their own and feature as living realities around us. Awe and wonder, when valued properly, open us up to that dimension or aspect of our lives which reaches beyond the simply material and physical into the spiritual. It draws us onto a pathway where we are gently ushered into a dialogue in which prayer and piety shape our outlook and help us answer the question of who and what we are called to be. To enter this moment requires courage. Courage to step outside the ordinary and to find the strength needed to take the risk. Is this the right choice, am I making a good judgement? Only through understanding, knowledge and wisdom can such judgement be assessed and it is the Spirit which offers us the tools with which to construct our response. The Spirit will, as Jesus himself told us last week, be our guide and will remind us of all that he said. In coming to understanding, we look to gain the knowledge needed to mine the wisdom that comes through knowing Christ in a tangible way.

How does this happen? Only by living the gospel can we encounter Christ. Only by sharing our faith and our faith experience will we see the gospel expressed. This is the pathway which lies before our young adults and we pray that they have the strength and the courage to step out onto it. But they also need our support and our encouragement to be strong and steadfast in their resolve. They will face challenges and disappointments, crises and heartache, but they will also experience joy and happiness, achievements and successes, and all will be very personal moments for each individual on their journey. Each moment will be real and decisive and each moment will be a moment of choice. In making that choice, the gospel values of faith, hope and love learnt and instilled by seeing the examples of how their family and their friends apply them will be vital.

Today's feast is not a departure but a coming. Although we lose the physical presence of Jesus he gives us the Holy Spirit as the Advocate. The Spirit who will stand beside us offering us the truth and the fullness of joy which we pray our candidates will experience as they are called on to *go and announce the gospel of the Lord.*