



Sixth Sunday of Easter A May 17, 2020

◆ Being Ready to Explain Our Catholic Beliefs

◆ Novena to the Holy Spirit

In the second reading today, Peter states: “*Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope but do it with gentleness and reverence*” (1Pt 3:15).

This verse could be interpreted on two levels: spiritual and theological.

On the *spiritual level*, the verse exhorts us to be always ready to witness to our faith. Millions of believers belong to a church family today because of the witness of other believers. This is especially true of Protestant evangelical churches. Their leaders have done a great job at teaching and inspiring their people to witness to their Christian beliefs and in motivating them to invite others into their church. While we all know that ‘*witness of life*’ is more important than ‘*witness of words*,’ words are also important—especially when people are going through a tough time spiritually. If the Samaritan woman in John 4 had not been willing to share her witness with the people of her village, they might never have come to know Jesus. Fortunately for them, she had no desire to make her encounter with Jesus her best-kept secret.

I sometimes wonder how many people are lost to our Catholic Church because so many of us are timid about inviting others to Church or sharing our faith with others. Needless to say, ‘*witness of life*’ is our best advertisement for our faith. After all, St. Francis of Assisi used to say: “Speak the gospel always. If necessary use words.” Sometimes, example is the best way to go. But sometimes, example can and should be accompanied by words. In the often used words of the late Pope John Paul II: “Do not be afraid.” Do not be afraid to share your faith. Do not be afraid to invite a non-churchgoer or a seeking non-Catholic to Church or to a retreat experience—Alpha or CRHP. I do know that some of you have grown very much in this area of your spiritual development because I have met people who now come to our Church because of your good example and witness.

On the *theological level*, the above verse from our second reading could also be interpreted to mean that we Catholics should be prepared to explain to others why we believe what we believe. I acknowledge that this is not an easy thing to do for the majority of Catholics, especially those who go through life with an elementary school understanding of our faith.

Thankfully, more and more Catholics are making time to become educated on Catholic beliefs and practices. More and more are becoming skilled at explaining, among other things:

- why we have a devotion to Mary and have certain beliefs about her, such as her Immaculate Conception and her Assumption into heaven (see Art 10 of my Catechism articles).
- why we have devotion to saints (see Art. 10).
- why we have the practice of Confession (see Art.15).
- why we believe Jesus founded our Church and intended for the Pope to be the successor of St. Peter; why we believe in papal infallibility when it comes to matters of faith and morals (see Arts 8 and 9).
- why Catholics believe in Purgatory when it is nowhere mentioned in the Bible.

Being a proud and humble Catholic

There was a period in our Church’s history when we Catholics believed that we were better than everyone else, and that we were the only ones to go to heaven. The recent clerical sex scandals have humiliated and humbled us—and rightly so. But such horrible failures in our Church should not lead us to be ashamed of our Church. We always have been, and always will be, a church of sinners. If there was one condition for entry into our Church, the sign on the door would read: Only Sinners may enter.

Despite the terrible sinfulness of the Church down through the ages, God has used this weak instrument to do many great things. In his introduction to his book *Rediscover Catholicism*, Matt Kelly gives us some great reasons why we as Church should be humbly proud of its achievements.

- **Education.** The Catholic Church is the institution that educated the masses of people who were not born into nobility or wealth. Matt Kelly writes:

The global reach and contribution of the Church is enormous, but the national impact of the Church on every aspect of society is also impressive, though largely unknown. In the United States alone the Catholic Church educates 2.6 million students every day, at a cost of ten billion dollars a year to parents and parishes. If there were no Catholic schools, these same students would have to be educated in public schools, which would cost eighteen billion dollars. The Catholic education system alone saves American taxpayers about eighteen billion dollars a year.

In the field of secondary education, the Church has more than 230 colleges and universities in the U.S., with an enrollment of seven hundred thousand students. And the Catholic and non-Catholic students educated in our schools and colleges go on to occupy many of the highest positions in any field. (p.18)

- **Healthcare.** The Catholic Church has a nonprofit healthcare system comprising 637 hospitals that treat one in five patients in the United States every day.

- **Outreach to the poor.** After the federal government, the Catholic Church in the United States helps the poor more than any other agency or institution. Wherever a global disaster occurs, Catholic Relief Services is present and helping. At home, *Catholic Charities* and many other Catholic agencies are on the front lines of outreach to the poor. Here in our own city, our Church is vigorously involved in outreach to the poor through our Thrift Store, Social Concerns, participation in Daily Bread, and overseas in Uganda.

- The Catholic Church has produced thousands and thousands of holy men and women. While holiness is the work of God in the life of an individual, the individual must cooperate with God's grace. We need guidance and help as we seek to live a holy life. Millions of us have found that help and guidance in the Catholic Church.

- Down through the ages, especially in the Middle Ages, the Church has been a great patron of the arts—which elevates the human mind and heart to God.

While the sex scandals have caused us rightly to hang our heads for a while, we have so many good reasons to be proud of the achievements of our Church. It would be sad if we allowed the sins and imperfections of the Church to prevent us from recognizing its tremendous accomplishments.

What sets them apart?

A few years ago, we sold 2,250 copies of Matt Kelly's book *Rediscover Catholicism—A Spiritual Guide to Living Life with Passion and Purpose*. One of the things I like about Kelly's book is that it inspires us to be the best that we can be, to be the best version of ourselves. The following is an excerpt.

What is it that sets those who achieve extraordinary things apart from the rest of us? Some people would tell you it is mere chance, that they simply found themselves in the right place at the right time. Others will tell you that these favored few had better connections with people of power and influence. Some people believe that God has favorites and these men and women are his chosen ones.

Do not allow your heart and mind to be deceived. There are two great differences between the heroes, leaders, champions, and saints that fill the history books and the rest of us. In the first place, they tended to have a singleness of purpose that penetrated every activity of their lives. And in the second place, they formed habits that helped them to achieve their goal. These weren't the mindless habits that are acquired by choosing the path of least resistance and maximum pleasure, but the life-giving habits that lead to excellence and holiness.

Singleness of purpose

As you study the lives of extraordinary people, you will discover that they are all marked by these two qualities. It doesn't matter if it is Bill Gates, Michael Jordan, or Mother Teresa; these characteristics can be found in each of their lives. Bill Gates wanted to dominate the software industry. He clearly defined his goal and thus had singleness of purpose. Then he developed habits in his life that would help him achieve his goal. Michael Jordan wanted to become the greatest basketball player in history. He had a clearly defined goal, a singleness of purpose. He did the things that moved him toward his goal and didn't do the things that didn't move him toward his goal. The same is true of Mother Teresa and of all the saints that honor the pages of Christian history. Mother Teresa wanted to love God with all her heart in every moment of every day. She clearly defined her goal and allowed this singleness of purpose to penetrate the everyday activities of her life.

It matters not whether it is in the field of business, sports, or spirituality. The same principles apply. They are the fundamentals of human excellence.

You may object, saying, "To dominate the software industry or be the greatest basketball player in history are not the noblest goals." This is true. The question

now becomes, “What is your goal?” Do you even have a clearly stated goal? Do you have this singleness of purpose that gives focus to a person’s life and allows him or her to excel beyond imagining?

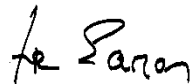
This singleness of purpose will save you from wasting your life in shallow and superficial activities that mean almost nothing to anyone and will mean even less one hundred years from now. Imagine how many people wanted to distract Michael Jordan from practicing basketball. Imagine how many nights his friends wanted him to go out and party and he didn’t, either because he had to practice or because he had to get up early the next morning for practice. Imagine how many people tried to distract Bill Gates from building Microsoft when he was in his late teens and early twenties. Similarly, imagine how many people tried to distract Mother Teresa from her prayer time or from her work with the poorest of the poor.

When you have singleness of purpose, everything else is embraced or discarded according to whether or not it moves you in the direction of your goal. When you don’t have this singleness of purpose, you get lost in the tossing and turning of daily life.

The whole world will get out of the way for the man who knows where he is going. For the man who does not, the world becomes a playground filled with distractions and nothingness. (pp 119-120)

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Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

NOVENA TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

May 21-29, 2020

Beginning Friday after Ascension through Saturday, Vigil of Pentecost

Before Jesus' Ascension into Heaven, he tells his disciples to return to Jerusalem and to wait in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:4-5). For the next nine days, the disciples, along with Mary and some other women, "devoted themselves to constant prayer" (Acts 1:14). This time of prayer is often called the first novena (meaning *nine*). A novena is a nine-day period of prayer for a particular intention.

You are invited to pray the following Novena to the Holy Spirit for any particular intention. You are encouraged to also pray for our Church family—that we will have a greater sense of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is God's greatest gift to us. For the next nine days, make a particular effort to be attentive and responsive to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in your daily life.

NOVENA OUTLINE

- Opening Prayer

*Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful
and enkindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit
and we shall be created
and you shall renew the face of the earth.*

- Meditate on Scripture assigned for each day (see next page).
- Pray one decade of the Rosary asking Mary to help you to become more attentive and responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.
- Closing Prayer

*Father of Light,
from whom every good gift comes,
send your Spirit into our lives
with the power of a mighty wind
And by the flame of your wisdom,
open the horizons of our minds.
Loosen our tongues to sing your praise
in words beyond the power of speech,
for without your Spirit
we could never raise our voices in words of peace
or announce the truth that Jesus is Lord!
Amen.*

Scripture Readings for the Nine Days

Day One

Luke 1:35

Mary conceives Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:21-22

Jesus is baptized with the Holy Spirit.

“Jesus, baptize me anew with your Holy Spirit.”

Day Two

John 7:37-39

Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit.

“Come, Holy Spirit, possess my whole being.”

Day Three

Acts 2:1-12

The promised Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples.

“Holy Spirit, awaken in me the fire of your love.”

Day Four

Acts 4: 32-37

Led by the Holy Spirit, the first followers of Christ join together in a small Christian community to share life and God’s deeds in their midst.

“Holy Spirit, may my faith friends and I grow in love for you.”

Day Five

Acts 10:44-48

The Holy Spirit is poured out on the Gentiles.

“Holy Spirit, help me to be open to your workings in the most surprising places and ways.”

Day Six

Acts 13:1-12

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas are discerned to go on their first missionary journey.

“Holy Spirit, help me to hear your voice when you call out to me.”

Day Seven

Rom 8:26-27

The Holy Spirit helps us in our prayer.

“Holy Spirit, teach me to pray.”

Day Eight

1Cor 3:10-16

The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the deep things of God.

“Holy Spirit, show me God’s path for my life.”

Day Nine

Gal 5:16-26

Paul names some of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. We are holy and Spirit-filled to the extent that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are operative in our lives.

“Holy Spirit, fill me with a Spirit of love, patience and joy.”