

Sixth Sunday of Easter, A – May 14, 2023 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 5:00pm Sat. Vigil and 8:30am Sunday Masses – 830 words

As we continue through the Easter season and our readings cause us to shift our attention toward the Lord's Ascension into Heaven and his pouring-forth of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we also have an opportunity to consider our growth in maturity in Christ. I say this because of the words Jesus himself spoke in today's gospel, which I will reference in a moment; but also, because of having reflected on the drastic change that we see in the apostles from before the Lord left their midst to after he poured out the Holy Spirit on them. And it leaves us to reflect: where are we at on our journey of maturation in the Lord?

"I will not leave you orphans", Christ said; "I will come to you". The apostles most certainly were still like children before him at this point. They still did not fully grasp who he was, or at least, to the extent that they did, they lacked confidence and boldness in living out the truth of the faith; yes, even after the Resurrection, they were found at times locked in rooms for fear of what might happen to them. And surely, thinking ahead to the Lord's departure from their midst, they must have been sad and bewildered about it: "How will we go on without him?" But Jesus assures them, "I will not leave you orphans".

He also promises them the Holy Spirit: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate *to be with you always*, the Spirit of truth...". We see the change effected in them after they receive this gift. There they are, locked in the upper room and praying at Pentecost. But then the Spirit comes to them and from that point on they are mature in Christ. They go out with boldness, like men, and proclaim the gospel everywhere, even laying down their lives for it. They were already chronologically mature, but now they are morally and spiritually mature as well. An amazing change took place.

What about us, though? In another passage, St. Paul reflected upon his own spiritual growth: "When I was a child," he said, "I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things." The things in us that are childish are often connected with our outlook, with what is important to us. St. Peter said in the second reading that we should always be ready to give a reason for our hope... but in what do we place our hope? This tends to change as we grow older – or it should. And this, I would maintain, is a good starting point for our self-evaluation about Christian maturity.

For when we are young we tend to look forward to all that this world has to offer: to having a long life, to having a great career, to making money, to finding happiness in earthly places and experiences. But as we grow older – at least, if we age well, in the Lord – we tend to look more beyond. We no longer find such satisfaction in the idea of a very long life, for life gets more difficult in some ways; we may well have achieved the great career, but we also learned that it still does not satisfy us in a lasting way; and so forth. With age, and an increase of the virtue of hope in us, our focus shifts – and this is a sign of maturation.

The apostles, filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised, no longer feared any earthly loss, nor were motivated by mere earthly happiness. Their one focus was on eternal life, on seeing Christ again in heaven, and on bringing many others there too. How this shift and growth in hope looks in each one of us will differ according to our state in life. The lay state is by its nature secular, connected in so many ways with life in this world. One who has received a call to celibacy, however, is supposed to be living more like the apostles did, with that focus entirely on the life to come and bringing many there.

Yes, maturation or growth in Christ has different nuances for us all, but at its base is the question: where does my hope lie; in what does it consist? And, how have I, since receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism and being strengthened in it through Confirmation, become more

mature in the different areas of my life? Christ did not leave us orphans, but some do hold on to an immature or childish state by failing to cooperate with the gift of the Holy Spirit he has given. The Lord wants us to be child-like, not childish. He wants us to order every aspect of our lives toward him. He wants us to be fully mature in him, full of hope.