PENTECOST A  Acts 2:1-21 1Cor. 12:3b-13 John 20:19-23

**Signs of a Healthy Parish**

Pentecost is often considered the birthday of the church.

Actually, the church was born out of the side of Christ on Calvary.

But we can say that Pentecost celebrates the church **“going public!”**

Tradition teaches that there are four marks of the church:

it is ***“one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.”***

The documents of the Second Vatican Council state

that the local parish is not merely a franchise of the universal church,

but the whole church realized locally in itself.

And when the church is seen as the local parish,

the four marks can be translated differently.

They become the **four** **“*Ms.*”: *melding, ministry, mirth,*** *and* ***mission****,*

and they are the marks of a healthy parish.

Let’s define these words within the context of today’s Scripture readings.

Take the first reading. It speaks of **melting** into a new community.

They asked in utter amazement, ***“Are not all these men Galileans?***

***How is it that each of us hears them in his native tongue?***

***We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites. We live in Mesopotamia,***

***Judea, and Cappadocia, the province of Asia, Phrygia,***

***and Pamphylia, Egypt, and regions around Cyrene.***

***There are even visitors from Rome….***

***Yet each of us hears them speaking….***

***about the marvels God has accomplished.”***

The cry must be the same in a healthy parish:

***“We are from Newton, Harvey County, Kansas.***

***We grew up in Wichita and the surrounding counties,***

***and from different Sates and even other countries.***

***From time to time, we have visitors from other countries as well.***

***Yet each of us hears about the marvels that God has accomplished.”***

And what marvels should all these expatriates hear?

The answer to this question leads us to the second reading

and the second ***M*: *ministry.***

***“There are different gifts but the same Spirit;***

***there are different ministries but the same Lord;***

***there are different works but the same God***

***who accomplishes all of them in everyone.”***

Could there be a better description of a healthy parish?

Look around a healthy parish and you will note the many gifts,

the extraordinary ministries, the outreach,

the care and concern of parishioners.

From a wonderful ***Payee Program*** to the ***Liturgical Ministries***,

from the soon to be ***“Clubhouse counseling Services”***

to the Wednesday night ***Evening Prayer*** and ***EFM studies!***

A healthy parish makes the words of the second reading ***“Gifts”***

which we hear about today, very real!

These are the ***“charisms – gifts”*** of a healthy parish,

Any such parish founded on shared and collaborative ministry,

serves as a model of ***“different gifts but the same Spirit.”***

This brings us to the Gospel, and two pregnant sentences from it

that speak of the third and fourth marks of a healthy parish.

The first sentence is**.**

***“At the sight of the Lord, the disciples rejoiced.”***

Added to ***melding and ministry***, what has always made a parish healthy

is ***mirth, rejoicing!***

No parish, of course, is a stranger to tears and grief, to sorrow and loss,

to tragedies and death. But beneath and between the tears

lies the bedrock of faith that justifies rejoicing.

***“At the sight of the Lord, the disciples rejoiced.”***

Holy laughter in the corridors of a healthy parish

has always taken the edge off sorrow.

Like my embarrassment once as I was customarily greeting people

after Mass, and rather jauntily said to one lady,

***“Mary, where is your husband this morning?”***

She answered (rather tartly, I thought), ***“Where is my husband?***

***Right where you buried him last week.”***

Oh God, how could I have forgotten!

(I might add: This woman has long since forgiven me.)

And then there is a teacher who told me about the time

she read the parable of the Good Samaritan to her class.

After reading the story, she asked the class

why the priest did not go over and help the man by the wayside.

A little girl answered,

***“Because he saw that the man had already been robbed.”***

You may appreciate this story which George Bush once told.

While he was President, Bush made a public relations visit

to a nursing home. There he came upon a wizened old man

hobbling down the corridor.

President Bush took the man’s hands in his own, looked into his eyes,

and said, ***“Sir, do you know who I am?”*** The man replied,

***“No, but if you ask one of the nurses, she will tell you.”***

Then there was the teacher who asked her third-graders

to write about their personal heroes.

One little girl brought home her essay and showed it to her parents.

Her father was flattered to discover

that his daughter had chosen him as her hero.

**“Why did you choose me?”** he asked expectantly.

The little girl replied, ***“Because I couldn’t spell Schwarzenegger.”***

Do you hear, the sound of laughter here?

That is the sound of disciples rejoicing!

Because, even though our individual sorrow may be great,

the **Pentecostal Spirit** of our parish has always made us laugh

because here

we are taught that God will always have the last word.

At the sight of the Lord, ***we*** disciples rejoiced –

always a sign of the **Risen Presence!**

And finally, there is this sentence from todays’ Gospel:

***“Jesus came and stood among them and said ‘Peace be with you.’***

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side,

Jesus said to them again, ***‘Peace be with you.***

***As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’”***

These words speak of ***mission****,* our last characteristic of a healthy parish.

They remind us that the task is far from finished.

Years of what has been, points to what must yet be, what lies ahead.

Jesus **still** shows his hands and his side today.

He **still** bears his wounds in the poor and downtrodden.

He **still** testifies to the terrible hunger for God which many people feel,

yet, which they do not know how to satisfy.

And so, they look for satisfaction in the slick, counterfeit ways

of drugs and sex and material consumption.

Jesus still stands before this parish, as he does

before every faith community, and shows us his wounds.

Each, and every one of us, need to tend to these wounds,

for Jesus will not allow complacency to set in.

Thus, the parish’s ***mission*** continues!

And so, to sum up, the four marks of a healthy parish are:

***melding, ministry, mirth, and mission.***

These four qualities must be part of every parish’s

past, present, and future;

its faith, hope, and love;

its pride, joy, and challenge;

its goal and its Pentecost!

Amen.