

6th Sunday in Easter

I was cruising around the internet the other night and I came across a website featuring photos from Life magazine celebrating the 40th Anniversary of Woodstock in 2009. Now for those of you, like myself, who are too young to have experienced Woodstock, (short pause) I will briefly explain:

Woodstock... the first one... was a three-day rock concert that was held on Max Yasgur's dairy farm in New York State in 1969. It featured some of the best musicians and bands of the day.

For those who like to romanticize about it, it is sobering to remember that it was muddy, loud, dirty, rainy, drug-fueled.... and it was big. There were an estimated 500,000 people crowded onto a fairly small place with no real transportation, poor sanitation, very little provision or even thought for food and no shelter except what you brought with you.

But for all of that, Woodstock was a defining event in American culture. It was billed and experienced by most who attended... as three days of peace, love and music.

It put the nation on notice that a new generation was coming into its own. A generation that would be less tolerant of war and violence. A generation that believed in the values of acceptance, freedom and peaceful co-existence between one another and between ourselves and nature.

Besides sending me to find and listen to my Janis Joplin albums, these pictures and captions caused me to do some thinking.

My friends, this is the generation that influences today's cultural standards. The Woodstock generation... are... the Generals, the politicians and the captains of industry. But that generation is dying out, the torch is being passed.

Since that Summer in 1969, America has seen an escalation in nuclear weapons, and involvement in a number of national and international scandals. We've been at war, in the Middle East and have involved our selves in a number of "peace-keeping" missions in which our sons and daughters have given their lives. We have a government that seems too big and out of control.

There is wholesale greed in our corporations, and we've suffered the loss or diminishment of a number of plant and animal species. We have experienced rampant pollution and abuse of our natural resources. Unemployment and homelessness are at near record highs, and we have the greatest increase in displaced families since the Great Depression. We have become a nation of the descendants of immigrants... intolerant of immigrants. It is legal in all fifty States to kill a child in the womb and illegal to carry more than 3 ounces of hand-sanitizer on an airplane.

My point is **not** that we live in a bad place, because for all of its shortcomings, there is still no better place than the United States to live in the world.

(Pause)

There is Good News. There is Hope.

Today, Jesus says to us:

MY PEACE I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. and He says ***Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.***

These are more than just comforting words, but may be understood as a promise and a mandate, not only for today, but for all the history of humanity since the Time of our Savior.

However, peace, by the world's standards has been all but impossible and our hearts are troubled by many burdens. We depend on the strength and virtue of ourselves... who are sinful, prideful and weak. The Woodstock Generation failed, as did all those before them.

That is why Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit, to aid us, to remind us of what Jesus said and did so that we might say and do as Jesus.

Our first reading demonstrates that the Holy Spirit will be given to all who will accept Him and desire to follow Him, Jew or Gentile.

As a Liturgical Church we have turned the corner today and are heading to the culmination of the Easter season....Pentecost where the Church was born and the new Jerusalem of our second reading had its beginning and on-going formation.

It is the Holy spirit that guides the Church as we heard in today's first reading, when the very young Church wisely settled disagreements within itself. It is this same Holy Spirit that will lead our 2000 year-old Church out of our current state of scandal.

We receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit at our Baptism and are given the fullness of the Holy Spirit at our Confirmation. The Holy Spirit is the agent of Christ's peace and consolation, wisdom and joy.....and that is our inheritance.With such a gift comes great responsibility.

And while we may hold these things in our hearts, we cannot keep the Holy Spirit nor our Faith closed within our hearts. The message of Jesus Christ, His peace and Salvation for all, can only be spread by those who know Him, by and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

You and me....we have the power to bring Christ's love and peace into our classrooms, our neighborhoods and our workplaces.

As Christians, we are not of this world, but we do live in it. We are not called merely to maintain it, but to change it for the better. We need to be more responsible for the environment. We need to hold our politicians and our corporations accountable. We need to fight the evil of abortion and champion the cause of life. We must work for justice, for the end of poverty and the halt of exploitation of other human beings.

But we cannot, we CAN....NOT succeed if these things are just social causes, no matter how sincere we might be in their pursuit.

That's not to say we shouldn't be passionate and that we shouldn't work hard for these things in the secular arena.....but without the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, any victories will be too small and any advances will be too short. None will be lasting.

By the virtue of our Baptism,... we already have the indwelling Holy Spirit. But like a language we learn in High School... and then forget because we don't use it... we need to reawaken the stirrings of the Holy Spirit in our souls.

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the One True God. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and always leads us back to them.

Each time we make the sign of the Cross, we open ourselves up to the very Father, Son and Holy Spirit we invoke. Think of the grace that provides and the example it sets, yet how often do we pray to the Holy Spirit.... specifically?

My challenge to each of us is this: make the Holy Spirit a habit. When we awake, let us pray "Come Holy Spirit". When we leave for work, "Come Holy Spirit". When we turn on the TV, or open the newspaper, or answer the phone and while surfing the web, "Come... Holy... Spirit".

Before too long we will instinctively come to rely on the Holy Spirit for thankfulness of everything good, and in help for every temptation. And through our prayerwhich..... willlead to action each of us will become a part of God's work to renew the face of the Earth. This is the hope we have in Jesus Christ.