

**THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, Year A**  
Acts 8:5-8,14-17; Ps 66:1-3,4-5,6-7,16,20; 1 Pt 3:15-18; Jn14:15-21

***CELL PHONES AND THE HOLY SPIRIT***

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun  
Sunday, May 21, 2017, 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. Masses

This past Monday our parish celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation for over 60 of our young people. It was a grand and glorious occasion at the Basilica of St. Mary in downtown Minneapolis. Usually the Basilica is “second tier.” The normal procedure is for the archbishop to get the cathedral in St. Paul, “premier duty,” while the auxiliary bishop gets the Basilica in Minneapolis. Archbishop Bernard Hebda presided for our Confirmation Mass, which was a bit of a surprise, and the Mass lasted for an hour and fifteen minutes, which was a total surprise, according to my memory, the shortest Confirmation Mass ever.

Archbishop Hebda preached about cell phones, so I guess I have license to speak about cell phones, too.

Cell phones are amazing. Imagine the world before cell phones. Some of our older members, me included, remember the days of party lines and rotary dials. Cell phones are communication and information central. When I was ordained a priest, I carried a beeper when I was on call. Beepers are long gone. Now I carry my cell phone which is instant access in the case of an emergency. When a person wanted to know when all of this rain is going to end, and if a person wanted to get the weather forecast, it was necessary to listen to the radio or turn on the TV. Now I get out my cell phone, click on The Weather Channel app, and presto, in less than a minute, I have the forecast. E-mail is available on the cell phone. Text messages The Internet.

Here is something to stretch your imagination. The Holy Spirit and a cell phone have a lot in common.

The arrival of the cell phone has caused dramatic change. The arrival of the Holy Spirit caused dramatic change.

I doubt that there are many of us who would like to go back to the days before cell phones.  
If we were to interview Peter and Andrew, James or John,  
I doubt that they would want to go back to the days before the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Before the days of cell phones, in the days of land lines alone,  
there were many times that we were out-of-contact with others.  
Now, even if we are away from a land line,  
in a store, in a boat, in the car,  
with a cell phone communication is instant and easy.

During the time of Jesus,  
communication with our Lord was limited to the place where he was:  
that day, that time, that place.  
Now, through the Holy Spirit, communication with Jesus is not limited at all.  
We don't need to go back 2000 years.  
We don't need to be in Israel:  
to go to Nazareth, Capernaum, or Jerusalem.  
Through the linkage of the Holy Spirit,  
we can talk to Jesus at home when we get out of bed in the morning;  
we can talk to Jesus when we are driving around in the car;  
and we can talk to Jesus when we are out in the boat fishing  
or out in the yard planting flowers or cutting the grass.

A cell phone is information at your fingertips.  
Those who are older: do you remember the days of encyclopedias?  
Do you remember Encyclopedia Britannica?  
I did door-to-door sales for them for two days!  
Encyclopedias are about as modern as rotary phones.  
Now, all a person has to do is ask Siri,  
or Google a word or a question,  
and presto, an answer is provided.

Spiritually, enlightenment and insight is at our fingertips.  
If we want to know what we should think,  
what we should do, what we should say,  
all we have to do is turn to the Holy Spirit and ask,  
and guidance is provided (see Gal 5:22-23).

Much of the information that cell phones provide is helpful,  
but many web sites, and much of social media, are unreliable,  
and really not all that trustworthy,  
and many sites are actually misleading or harmful.

Here is a place where the Holy Spirit is different.  
The Holy Spirit leads us to truth (Jn 14:17a).

Circumstances are always changing.  
The gospel needs to be reapplied to new situations.  
Who could have imagined such an information explosion?  
Who could have imagined such changes in technology?  
Who could have imagined such advances in medicine?  
With every new development,  
there are new questions about how to use them properly.  
The Holy Spirit guides us to truth (Jn 14:17a),  
how to do medicine within moral limits,  
how to use information and technology to seek the truth,  
to know the truth, and to promote the common good.

To me, maybe the most remarkable thing about the Holy Spirit  
is how the Holy Spirit is such a game changer.  
Really and truly, with cell phones, there is no going back.  
Cell phones have changed the way we do business.  
But to an even greater extent, the Holy Spirit changes everything.

Let us take Peter for example:  
Peter before the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost,  
and Peter after the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

I was at a workshop recently conducted by a Jesuit priest from Georgetown University,  
and he offered a reflection on Peter's life,  
and he explained that the biggest motivating factor driving Peter's behavior  
was his fear of death.  
The pattern is fairly easy to see.

Let's start with the time that Jesus said that he would be going to Jerusalem.  
He explained that he would be rejected by the religious leaders,  
and then he would be killed (Mk 8:31).  
Peter objected, "Don't go" (implied, Mk 8:32),  
not so much because he did not want Jesus to die,  
but because if he went with him,  
there was a good chance the he would also be killed,  
and Peter was terrified at the prospect of death.

Remember the night when there was a storm at sea,  
the night when the disciples were in the boat and Jesus walked on the water? (Mt 14:22-33).  
Peter got out of the boat and began to walk toward Jesus on the water (Mt 14:29),  
but when Peter took his eyes off of Jesus, he began to sink (Mt 14:30a),  
and he cried out, "Lord, save me!" (Mt 14:30b).  
When Peter said, "Save me,"  
he wasn't talking about his salvation and eternal life.  
Peter did not want to drown.  
Peter was terrified at the prospect of death.

Let's fast forward to Holy Thursday night at Gethsemane.

When Jesus was arrested,

Judas Iscariot was already gone (Mk 14:10)

and the other ten had deserted Jesus (Mk 14:50),

but Peter followed a safe distance behind to the high priest's courtyard (Mk 14:66).

When one of the high priest's maids asked Peter about his association with Jesus,

Peter vehemently denied Jesus (Mk 14:68).

Why?

Not because Peter did not believe in Jesus,

but because he was terrified at the prospect of death.

When Jesus was crucified on Good Friday,

Peter was nowhere to be found.

He was barricaded in the Upper Room,

behind doors that were barred and locked (see Jn 20:19).

Why?

Peter was afraid that if he was at Calvary near Jesus,

that because he was Jesus' closest partner, he would be crucified, too,

and Peter was terrified at the prospect of death.

Finally, after Jesus rose from the dead,

Jesus appeared to Peter along the Sea of Galilee,

and Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" (Jn 21:15).

Our English translation is sadly lacking

and it fails to distinguish between two different Greek verbs.

Jesus asked Peter, "Do you *agape* me?" (Jn 21:15a).

"Do you love me totally and with all your heart?

Do you love me with the same sort of love that I just demonstrated on the Cross?

Do you love me with a crucified love?

Do you love me so much that you would be willing to lay down your life for me?

(see Jn 10:15,17,18; 15:13).

And Peter sheepishly replied, "Yes, Lord, I *philos* you" (Jn 21:15b),

"I like you." "I'm your buddy."

But a crucified love, no way!

Peter was terrified at the prospect of death.

Then the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4).

Peter, who once was terrified at the prospect of death,

stood up before a large crowd of people in Jerusalem and preached about Jesus (Acts 2:14-41).

Preaching about Jesus could get a person in trouble.

It could get a person thrown in jail (Acts 4:3; 5:18).

It could get a person crucified (see Jn 21:18b,19).

Peter didn't care anymore.  
He was no longer terrified at the prospect of death.  
His fear of death vanished in an instant.  
Because of the Holy Spirit, Peter was a man completely transformed.

Life without the gospel is not worth living.  
Life without Jesus is not worth living.  
Jesus is the way (Jn 14:6).  
Jesus leads us to the truth (Jn 14:6,17a).  
Jesus gives us meaning and purpose in life.  
His gospel gives us direction for how to live our life.

The transformative effect of the Holy Spirit upon Peter  
before Pentecost and after Pentecost,  
is far more remarkable than the days before cell phones and days after cell phones.  
Cell phones have changed the way we do business.  
The coming of the Holy Spirit has changed far more.

The coming of the Holy Spirit keeps us connected to God.  
The coming of the Holy Spirit is a constant supply of grace for you and me.  
The coming of the Holy Spirit leads us to truth and keeps us on the right path.  
The coming of the Holy Spirit helps us overcome our fears,  
to be courageous disciples for Jesus,  
to be so alive for Christ that we are no longer terrified at the prospect of death,  
and are willing to lay down our life for Jesus in service of God and neighbor.

Cell phones have changed the way we do business,  
but cell phones pale in comparison to the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit is the abiding presence of Jesus.  
The Holy Spirit is truth.  
The Holy Spirit takes people who terrified at the prospect of death,  
and enables them to lay down their lives for Jesus and the gospel.