

(Vigil)—“Rivers of living waters will flow from within him who believes in me.”

(Day)—“Receive the Holy Spirit. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, in 1983, when Israel occupied Lebanon, a 13-year-old boy in Evanston, Illinois, made his Bar Mitzvah. After the rite, the boy read a letter he was sending to Menachem Begin, then Prime Minister of Israel. He introduced the letter thus:

“My Bar Mitzvah is a time when I become a Jewish adult... I have an obligation to speak my mind... so, I am sending a letter to Prime Minister Begin. I’d like to read it to you.

‘Dear Prime Minister Begin: On the occasion of my Bar Mitzvah, I feel an obligation to speak my mind about the war in Lebanon.... I understand why you did what you did.... (BUT...) I think the war was the wrong way.... If this ever happens again, I recommend that you take the first step toward peace... by going to each of the Arab countries... just as Sedat came to Israel. If Israel were at peace with the Arabs, the PLO would no longer have a base for hurting and killing Jews in Israel.

The boy ended his letter saying:

“Instead of centerpieces, candy, and nuts on the tables of my Bar Mitzvah party, I have asked my family to send the money to the hospital in Netanya, Israel, where the Jews, who were hurt in the war, are being treated for their injuries. Sincerely yours, Peter Burgh”

Now, **“How do Peter’s Bar Mitzvah letter and his gift of money to the Jewish hospital speak to us about today’s Feast of Pentecost?”** you ask. **Well, I am glad you asked that question!**

You see, the Jewish Rite of Bar Mitzvah commissions Jewish young people to assume a more active role in the Jewish community. It calls them to adult service and adult responsibility.

Peter Burgh’s letter and gift of money represent his attempt to carry out his new, adult responsibilities. They represent an attempt to put **‘teeth’** into his Bar Mitzvah Rite.

This is, precisely, a purpose of our yearly celebration of Pentecost!

The Feast of Pentecost **acts as a call to service**. It reminds Christians, the world over, that they must put **‘teeth’** into their Confirmation-commitment, that is, to translate it into **concrete action!**

For some, it means being called to ‘high-profile service.’ It means witnessing to the Gospel in a highly visible way, such as do priests, deacons, nuns, and brothers. It often means preaching the Gospel publicly and exercising public leadership in the Christian community.

For others, it means being called to ‘low-profile service.’ It means witnessing to the Gospel in a less visible way. It means things like prayer and sacrifice for the Christian community. It means doing things like Peter Burgh did. It means taking some leadership role in parish life.

Realize, the services of Christians differ ...because spiritual gifts of Christians differ. Paul makes this precise point in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians. He writes:

“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, BUT... the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, BUT... the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, BUT... the same God gives ability to everyone for their particular service.” 1Cor.12:4-6

The Feast of Pentecost is a call to action. It tells us that we must put **‘teeth’** into our Confirmation commitment. It tells us we must translate it into action.

I will now illustrate this with the following story:

“Once upon a time, back in the 1930’s, a young traveler was exploring the French Alps. He came upon a vast stretch of barren land. It was desolate. It was forbidding. It was ugly. It was the kind of place from which one turns away.

Then, suddenly, the young traveler stopped dead in his tracks. To his amazement, in the middle of this vast wasteland, he saw a bent-over, old man. As he approached the old man, he saw on his back, a sack of, what turned out to be, acorns. In his hand was a 4-foot-long, black, iron pipe with a footstep near the bottom.

The old man was using the iron pipe & footstep to punch holes into the ground. Then, from the sack, he would drop an acorn in the hole and cover it up.

The old man said: **‘I’ve planted over 100,000 acorns. Perhaps only a 10th of them will grow’.**

(The old man’s wife and son had died and this is how he chose to spend his final years.)

‘I want to do something useful,’ he said.

Twenty-five years had passed and the traveler returned to the same desolate spot. What he saw amazed him again. He couldn’t believe his eyes.

The land was covered with a beautiful forest two miles wide and five miles long. Birds were singing. Squirrels & chipmunks were playing. Deer were dancing. And wildflowers perfumed the air.

The traveler stood there recalling the desolate area that was once there and beheld the beautiful area that was there now—all because someone cared, had put ‘teeth’ into a commitment.”

Pentecost is a call to action. It is a call to us to do **our** part to spread God’s Kingdom on earth. On Ascension Thursday, Jesus handed on the baton, so to speak, & gave us the responsibility to carry on what he had begun, to finish the race he had started. With Pentecost—and our own Confirmation—he gave us the Holy Spirit to help us.

You and I cannot change the world, **BUT**—we can change our part of it, where we live and eat and sleep ...just as the old man once did!

We received our sack of acorns and our black, iron pipe, so to speak, when we were Confirmed. With honesty, integrity, and the Holy Spirit... the rest is up to us.

All it takes is a little courage—the kind of courage that Peter Burgh showed in writing to the Prime Minister, the kind of courage the old man showed in planting his acorns.

I close with this prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

Come as fire to warm us.

Come as wind to cleanse us

Come as light to guide us.

Come as power to enable us.

Come Holy Spirit, come!

Help us renew the face of the earth—

at least... where we live, eat, and sleep... here in our corner of the vineyard! Amen.

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you, the Father, the Son and, especially, the Holy Spirit.
Amen.