

## **From the PA's Desk**

### **Bishop Cistone's Mother's Day Visit:**

Next Sunday on Mother's Day, the Bishop will join us here at the 9:30 a.m. Mass to formally call me to Candidacy for Holy Orders, and his intention is to ordain me a deacon on June 11 with the eight married men who will be permanent deacons. After I begin serving as a deacon, he and I will continue our discussion about possible priesthood ordination in the future. I am grateful to the Lord, the Bishop, and a number of dedicated priests in the Diocese of Saginaw, who are with me on this journey as I continue to discern God's will for my life. I'm also grateful to you as a parish for helping me confirm what my vocation really is. As they say, "better late than never!" Blessings to all of you, and I hope you can celebrate Mother's Day with me at Mass. Since it's Mother's Day, I'll have boxes of chocolate for all the mothers!

### **First Communions:**

This Sunday, our 13 children and families who have been preparing all year for Confirmation and Eucharist, complete their Sacraments of Initiation as they join us at the table of the Lord in Holy Communion. Let us continue to pray that Jesus will continue to make himself known to them and their families through the breaking of the bread with us at Mass each week.

### **Parish Photo Directory**

It has been six years since our last Parish Photo Directory, and it's time for a new one. Judi Degruise has volunteered to act as coordinator, which she also did for the last one. She will need others to assist her, so she might be asking you for some help, or you can talk to her if you want more information. Unlike previous directories, since we are all one parish now, the family photos and photos of our two churches can appear in one section.

### **C.S.A.**

Coming Soon! This year, the theme of the Diocesan appeal is **Advancing the Mission of Christ - Here I Am Lord**. Reflecting on this theme and the many charitable activities in which our parishes and Diocese are involved, we must remain faithful to our baptismal call and the very reason for our work, to Advance the Mission of Christ. Thank you for your support and stewardship to our parish. You will be receiving a mailing from the Diocese soon, and hopefully you'll be able to help us develop new programs in our parish, including Whole Community Catechesis, which we will begin next year. We'll also begin the second phase of our evangelization and outreach efforts.

### **Alpha this week: How Can I Resist Evil**

## **Alpha Day of Reflection:**

Last Wednesday the Gospel Reading of the Day was taken from John's Gospel Chapter 14, in which Jesus states: *"Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I say to you, **whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these**, because I am going to the Father. And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it."*

I have always been awestruck at Jesus' words that **WE** "will do the works" that Jesus does, "and will do greater ones" than those. How is that even possible, that **WE** can do the works of Jesus and even greater ones than he!? Jesus said it, so it must be true, but how? The answer I believe has to do with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This Saturday the Alpha participants had a day of reflection in which we focused exclusively on the Holy Spirit (which unfortunately for us Catholics seems to be a forgotten person of the Trinity). Without the Holy Spirit though, we would not be here talking about God or Jesus. So as we in the Alpha experience approach the end of Alpha, and the anticipation of Pentecost Sunday in June, we took a deeper look at the Holy Spirit in our lives, and how this same Holy Spirit can transform our faith community into the bold witnesses that the early disciples of Jesus were.

I'd like to share with you some of our talking points from Saturday, as a way to help catechize everyone on the mystery of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

### **Talking Point 1: The Holy Spirit makes us Sons and Daughters of God**

In Romans 8 we are reminded: *"... those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by him we cry, Abba Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we're God's children. And if we're children, then we're heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."*

Here's the first thing: being a son or a daughter of God is the highest privilege that we can ever have. You are adopted into God's family. Under Roman law, which is probably what was in Paul's mind, adoption was just the highest privilege. You could have no higher status than being adopted into a Roman family. We human beings can be strange people and we often look for status — there's no higher status than being a son or a daughter of God.

Secondly, it connotes great intimacy. That verse goes on to say: *"But by him we cry, Abba, Father."* Abba is a very interesting word because it's an Aramaic word, and the translators haven't even bothered to try and translate it because it's so hard to translate. They've left it as it is. It's one of the most important words in the New Testament. It's the word that would have been used by a child to their father; but not just when they were a child, but all the way through life. So it's almost like 'Dad' or 'Daddy' but it doesn't have the childish connotations that those words might have in our society. It's a word suggesting a very close intimacy of relationship. It's a word that was distinctive to Jesus. Nowhere in the Old Testament is God referred to as **Abba**, but Jesus used it to express his relationship with God, and then he said, *You can have the same*

*relationship. God can be your father, with the same word being used as I use in my relationship with the Father, “Abba.”*

### **Talking Point 2: The Holy Spirit helps us Develop the Relationship**

So the first effect of the Spirit of God coming to live within a person is that they become a son or a daughter of God. The second thing is that the Spirit then helps us to develop that relationship. We all know that relationships grow by communication, so the Spirit of God helps us to pray, to speak and to know God. The Spirit gives us access to God as we pray. We're able to come, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, into the presence of God.

In the New Testament “access” is a wonderful word — pointing out the fact that we have access to God the way Jesus did. There's nothing, if you like, between us and God. There's no barrier between us. Often I think we humans feel as if there is a barrier — but it's a mental barrier that is our own creation. St Paul writes later in Romans 8: **“the Spirit helps us in our weakness”** because we don't know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us.

If ever we doubt that God works through paradoxes, and in ways that seem to go against what our world and society tell us are important, that line surely reminds us of that. God's power comes through weakness. In fact, when we look at the most significant encounters with God in the Bible, we find God shining forth in the most unwanted and unsuspected places in the world: the material and even vulnerable world. So whereas the values of the world tell us that power and control are indicators of success, God's message is that vulnerability, weakness, and even powerlessness are the allies of God. Most people like to think of God in terms of love, but even if you think about your own experiences of love, love too is always about giving up control. This is also true of faith. We see this especially in Jesus' death on the cross. Among other things, it tells us how God loves and redeems us even when we are unfaithful and our lives are broken.

It is not surprising that hundreds of millions of people, young and old, wear a cross in some form. The cross is the ultimate symbol of love. It shows us what love is, and what love does for us. It is a reminder that God works through all the broken moments of our lives. Perhaps that is why we Catholics like our cross to have the image of the crucified Christ on it, because it reminds us that God embraces our broken humanity, and then redeems it.

So the Holy Spirit helps us in the relationship, he (he or she if you'd like, but never an it) helps us to pray, and then also helps us understand God's word. And it's the Holy Spirit who brings that understanding and helps us then to develop our relationship with God.

### **Talking Point 3: The Holy Spirit brings us the Family Likeness**

The Holy Spirit brings the family likeness. It's obvious that children very often look like their parents. The amazing thing is that they so often look like both parents, even if the parents look quite different from each other. But it's not just a genetic thing; it's partly a genetic thing, but it's also, I think, spending time together. Isn't it amazing how husbands and wives often grow to look like each other! St. Paul says about the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:18, **“we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”**

So Paul is saying that when the Spirit of God comes to live within a person, he will bring about this family likeness, becoming more like God, becoming more like Jesus. How does this happen? Galatians Chapter 5 gives us the answer: ***“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*** This is the Spirit of Jesus coming to make us more like Jesus.

So what are the characteristics the Spirit wants to bring to us? The first, and most important, is love. When we experience God’s love for us, the love of God being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit; that in turn should flow out in love for God and love for other people.

Joy is next. At the Confirmation ceremony a few weeks ago Bishop Cistone spoke of the difference between joy and happiness. Joy is very different from happiness. Nowhere are we guaranteed happiness as Christians. Some people in fact have very difficult lives, many struggles that they have to cope with. But what the New Testament promises us is joy, which is far deeper because joy comes from the realization that we are living both our good and bad days with the Lord next to us.

Peace is different also. Again, this is not a superficial peace but peace in the midst of trouble, anxiety, and struggle. It’s like a kind of deep ocean current. There might be a storm on the surface — wind and waves; but deep down an inner peace which comes from having peace with God. And it flows out in wanting to bring peace to others.

Finally, the Holy Spirit brings gifts for all God’s children. In 1 Corinthians 12, St. Paul writes this: ***“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in everyone. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good . . . wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, powers, prophecy, discernment, tongues . . . all of these are works of the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”***

Paul’s list is not an exhaustive list — in other lists of the Spirit we get gifts of service, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, showing mercy, evangelists, pastors — all kinds of gifts, including creative and artistic gifts. The point is that we need all of them. Paul uses the analogy of a body, ***“the nose can’t say I’m more important than the eye.”*** We need every different part of the body of Christ.

The theologian Jurgen Moltman put it like this: *“In principle, every human person has the potential and capacity to become a gift of the Spirit through a person’s call, if only they’re used in Christ.”*

The church is not meant to be a kind of one-person show. Too often churches have become a sort of one-man show — the pastor does everything, or sister does everything, or the priest or the director of faith formation does everything. Someone likened the church to being like a kind of football match in which you have “22,000 people desperately in need of exercise, watching 22 people desperately in need of a rest!” The church can become like that, with a few people doing everything. The Holy Spirit though has given all the gifts needed to effectively be the body of Christ in our own little piece of Isabella County to ALL of us, and if we are effectively going to be Jesus’ presence in this area, we all need to name our gifts and put them to use for the rest of the community.