

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 17, 2020

“Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”
(Acts 8:14-16)

The unity between Baptism and the Holy Spirit, found in this selection of The Acts of the Apostles, is a topic that has often become misunderstood. With the historical rise of “Tent Revivals” in the United States, many people associate the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues, joyful music, excited dancing, and other such things. If we were to examine Baptism in Water and Baptism in the Holy Spirit, one would find that the meaning becomes a beautiful continuation of the “Theology of Self-Giving Love” first begun in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament contains various instances where gifts offered to God are consumed by fire. You may recall the story of the battle between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40), when fire came down from heaven to consume the sacrifice offered to God. We also read in passages where sacrifices presented to God in the Temple of Jerusalem were burned in fire. We also acknowledge from history that the Jewish people celebrated a ceremonial Baptism with water, best illustrated by John the Baptist, where the individual was totally immersed in the water to symbolize their complete conversion and purification. In these few examples, along with so many more, we are able to understand that the offering, either a gift or the person themselves, must be a total offering.

This idea of Baptism, through either water or the fire of the Holy Spirit, does not cease when we arrive at the time of Jesus. Jesus teaches us this through His own acceptance of the Baptism of Suffering He fully goes through when He so often spoke of it as “drinking the Chalice of Suffering.” The fullness of Jesus’ baptism begins in the waters of the Jordan and culminates with His death upon the cross. Jesus unites the full immersion in water to the full immersion in His Passion. Both acts of His love make available the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for they are fully given and lovingly accepted.

In today’s reading from Acts, the Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, continue this “Theology of Self-Giving Love” through providing the Holy Spirit to the people of Samaria. The people’s offering of themselves to God is lovingly accepted and blessed, not by just the Apostles, but confirmed by the Gift of the Holy Spirit. The Church has maintained this reality through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

Let us rejoice today, not solely because we are now able to worship again as a family, but that God has received our gifts of ourselves; first begun in our Baptism and sealed at our Confirmation. The Holy Spirit, in these two great “Sacraments of Initiation,” has and is still accepting the daily offerings we make to God, who loves us so very much. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, will continue until the day we die, to assist us to offer the gift of ourselves in a more complete manner. The Holy Spirit will console us when we fall, and strengthen us to rise again to join God, His angels, and His saints for all eternity in the blessedness we call Heaven.