

Sermon for 12 June 2011
Whitsunday

+In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

As many of you know, I was away last weekend for my five year reunion at Colgate. One is always surprised about what's happened to some of one's classmates, particularly those with whom one hasn't kept in contact. Of course, a number of my classmates didn't surprise me when I learned that they had become doctors or attorneys or financiers or were in some doctoral program somewhere. Others were more of a surprise.

One fellow, who was quite a "party guy" as an undergraduate had become an anesthesiologist. I was happy for him, but I couldn't say that I'd be particularly comfortable under the knife if he had been the one to put me under; I'm certain he had become quite responsible, and I knew him to be intellectually capable, but memories of parties at which I'd seen him had (probably unfairly) colored

my judgment. Another classmate had married and already had a child. I knew these things happened in theory, but seeing an old friend with a child-in-arms was rather strange, nonetheless.

It is surprising what happens when somebody grows up. We were, of course, all legally adults when we knew each other in college, but being over the age of eighteen does not necessarily indicate anything about maturity in the more important sense of the word. We all had a safety net in those days: we lived in an artificial kind of society made up of dorm rooms and class rooms and (sometimes unfortunately) administrative offices. It was surprising and wonderful to see that after leaving Colgate, so many of my fellows had really become adults in the full sense of the word; they were making adult decisions and taking upon themselves the responsibility we had all happily ceded to professors and campus life staff members. Leaving

the safety net of a liberal arts college was necessary for us to grow into adults.

We see a similar situation at the first Pentecost. The disciples had had a safety net. Jesus called the shots during his earthly ministry, and now they are left behind to continue on their own. Christ is ascended into heaven. God is no longer experienced in quite the same way as when a man named Jesus, who is God, was walking around in ancient Palestine and you could touch him. The disciples are thrown out into the world on their own. The initial, natural response to such a reality is the response of the disciples- feel abandoned, get frightened, lock yourselves up in a room in Jerusalem just like when you thought Jesus was dead forever.

The good news of Pentecost is that God has not abandoned us at all. He is still present and active in our lives and in the life of the Church, albeit in a new and different way. He still supports us,

the support is just a little different. Direction is still provided, it's just in a different way. A lot more independence is expected, and a lot more trust is required. You see, it's a little like growing up- graduating and moving out and the rest. God's still here, it's just different, because we've grown up a little.

We miss this if we take a purely functional view of the Holy Ghost. We miss the point of Pentecost and the Church's life after it, if we think about the Holy Spirit entirely in terms of what He does. We can start to think about the Holy Spirit as some obscure agent who accomplishes tasks. He's kind of like the universal translator in Star Trek (you know, the device that let the crew of the Enterprise talk to Vulcans and Klingons and the like in more-or-less proper English). That's kind of what he does on the first Pentecost. He's also kind of like a prayer partner. Paul says he cries "Abba, Father" within us to bear witness that we

are children of God. He's also kind of like a counselor (or, to use the biblical term, a Paraclete). He comforts us when we're in pain (like a therapeutic *counselor*) and he intercedes for us in the court of heaven (like a *legal counsel*).

But, like I said, if we get bogged down in tasks which we tend to attribute to the Holy Spirit, we miss the larger point. The important truth about Pentecost is that God is still with us, but not in the same way he used to be. The Father has given us a little more line. God, the Holy Spirit, still directs us, but we've grown up and we've got to get on with the Christian life as adults. We can go back for a college reunion, but we can't linger forever. We can, and must, come back to church week-by-week and feed on the goodness of God in the sacrament, but we don't have the luxury of staying put anymore. We don't have the luxury of hanging out in Galilee with Jesus all the time. We've got to get back into the mission field, beyond these

walls, to get on with the work God has given us to do.

The blessed assurance of God's continued presence, which is the Holy Ghost, roused the apostles out of their fear and their complacency. It got them to grow up, to go out, and to spread the Gospel. That is the promise and the challenge of Pentecost for each of us and for the Church as a whole. We've got the *freedom* to do God's work and the *promise* of his presence. When we're dismissed from Church we're dismissed with marching orders (pay attention at the end of the service). Let's actually make a point of "going in peace to love and serve the Lord", of "going forth in the name of Christ" to do his will, of "going out into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit." We may be assured that when we do, God will not abandon us, but he will give us the room to do his work ourselves, if we have the courage and conviction to try.

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Amen.