

LIVING BY THE SPIRIT – THE SPIRIT OF RELATIONSHIP – THE FRUIT OF LOVE

Luke 1:39-45; 2 Corinthians 5:16-20

We are exploring the Holy Spirit this summer and we are using the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22 as our guide and lens to understand who the Holy Spirit is. Let me read for you again Galatians 5:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This week and next week the focus of our attention will be on the fruit of love.

How is the Holy Spirit expressed

and how do we know the Holy Spirit by way of love?

It is appropriate to start here, since this is where God starts.

For God so loved the world, he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Further, it is foundation for everything the Apostles do following the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

We love because God first loved us (1 John 5).

Love, as many of you know, is an intellectual exercise until you actually experience it.

Then, whether it is the initial rush of realizing you are the object of another's affection and you likewise share that affection for the other like in a first love or in marriage,

or it is the subtle deepening of trust and consideration of another in the gradual building of a strong friendship,

when we are in the actual experience of love,

it transcends into the realm of mystery.

We really only know what love is like in relationship to the relationships we are in and have been in.

Aristotle says the height of love in our relationships is a remnant of paradise itself.

Last week, I said the Holy Spirit does stuff.

She does all kinds of things, but perhaps the most valuable and important is the act of drawing us into meaningful relationships with others and with God.

The Holy Spirit has a good reason for doing this with and for us. Because the Holy Spirit is in the Trinity of God and Christ, she is in a perfect relationship with God and Christ.

This relationship is defined by

open communication,

mutuality, equality,

intentionality and the unity of desire and will.

This way of relationship is always the case for the Three in One and each One in the Three.

Out of this mutual, intentional, equal, open and unified relationship, the Holy Spirit reaches out and draws us into meetings and relationships and opportunities with others so we might become actors and actresses on a stage which begins to mirror this relationship of the Trinity.

This is how we, in the words of 2 Corinthians, become

“Ambassadors for Christ”.

If we can remember that the goal of our relationships,
with God and with others,
is always the glory of God,
and that the glory of God
is always grounded in the love expressed by Christ
in his earthly life and by the Trinity in God's eternal life,
then we will be living by and through Spirit-filled relationships
with one another.

Right now, we are talking deep theology here.

A lot of this comes from my reflections on the wonderfully
named theologian, Hans Urs Von Balthasar.

As I said at the beginning, though,

we really only know the Spirit's work in relationships by the love
expressed in those relationships.

So let's look at one of those relationships in Scripture.

Mary is pregnant with the Son of God when she goes to the
hill country to visit her relative, Elizabeth.

Mary has made this journey after she has made the following
confession:

Behold the handmaid of the Lord;

be it unto me according to thy word (Lk 1:38).

She goes to Elizabeth fully committed to the will of God.

She goes to Elizabeth as one who has been incorporated into
the fullness of God's relationship with the persons of the
Trinity –

a relationship she now has that is completely congruent with
the will and desire of God.

She is fully in herself.

Or, to say it another way,

Mary has become who she was meant to be in the eyes
of God.

Then Scripture tells us:

*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child (John the
Baptist) leaped in her womb.*

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit...(Lk 1:41).

Mary is literally *the* Ambassador for Christ in this moment.

The Ambassador for Christ carries the actual presence of Christ
within her

and that presence greets the Prophet of God,

and in that meeting, the Holy Spirit fills Elizabeth.

The relationship between Mary and Elizabeth becomes a reflection of
the relationship between

God the Creator,

Christ the Redeemer

and the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer.

The relationship between Mary and Elizabeth

becomes a model for our relationships with one another.

The fruit of love is most accentuated in the Spirit of relationship,
and the Spirit of relationship, for centuries,
found its highest expression in what St. Francis de Sales called
“*Spiritual Friendship*”.

Spiritual friendship is, in de Sales understanding, completely a work
of the Holy Spirit.

He called it a friendship defined by *cordiality*,
where cordiality is the highest expression of love.

The word is intended to evoke the root of the word,
cor, which is “heart” in Latin.

So “cordiality” means spiritual friendships are those
friendships defined by affairs of the heart,

which is the seat of the will and desire.

A friendship aligned with the desires and will of God is a truly
spiritual friendship.

And that is the relationship we are seeing today with Mary and
Elizabeth.

This is a friendship which, in the presence of the Holy Spirit and Jesus
Christ,

evokes blessing, humility and praise for one another and for God.
Listen to Elizabeth's words:

*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your
womb.*

*And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord
comes to me? ...*

*And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of
what was spoken to her by the Lord.”*

Do we, like Mary, believe that the Holy Spirit will fulfill what has
been spoken to us by the Lord?

Do we trust God to do as God said?

Are we willing to let the Holy Spirit lead us, like Elizabeth,
into blessing, humility and praise?

And, at the core of it,

do we have friends in Christ who give us the opportunity to share
what the Spirit has done for and with us?

Proverbs 17 tells us

A friend loves at all times (:17).

And Jesus tells us

*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for
one's friends (Jn 15:13).*

The Spirit of relationship becomes a channel for Christ's reconciling
love to work in our relationships.

In Mary, we see this coming about in her relationship with Elizabeth.
Impossible things become possible in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In the presence of the Holy Spirit,

we begin to live into the fulness of all which God desires and wills for
us.

In our Spirit-filled relationships with one another,

we, like Mary in the midst of trial, judgment and tribulation,

truly become who we were meant to be,

because it is right there in such a relationship that
the fruit of love manifests our deepest likeness to God.

*So God created humankind in his image, in the image
of God he created them; male and female he created
them (Gen 1:27).*

The image of God is the relationship God shares with the Holy Spirit
and Christ.

Through the work of Jesus Christ we are invited and welcomed into
that perfect and perfecting relationship of the Trinity.

As 2 Corinthians 5 tells us,

this relationship is defined by reconciliation,
the bringing together of

souls separated from God,

souls separated from friends and families

and souls separated from themselves.

A Spirit-filled relationship is a reconciling relationship.

In Mary and Elizabeth, a family is once again brought
together.

Elizabeth finds consolation and promise in her meeting with
Mary,

and Mary finds refuge with a friend in what has to be an
incredibly difficult situation.

Remember, Mary is an unmarried future teen mom in a
culture that looks harshly upon such situations.

Through the reconciliation offered in friendship,
both Mary and Elizabeth become Ambassadors for Christ,
for God's reconciling love through Jesus Christ.

Reflect for a moment:

*Do you have a friendship that is Spirit-filled, a friendship that is
defined by cordiality,*

*by the open, mutual, intentional, unified ways of God's Trinitarian
being?*

Do you long for that sort of friendship with somebody?

Is there a Spirit-filled relationship of cordiality in your life?

Or has there ever been?

The risk is great in such a friendship.

It means taking what may be a friendship of circumstance –

most of our friendships are friendships of circumstance –

and deliberately opening it up to something far more.

Mutual and intentional friendship means saying something like,

You and I have known one another for a long time.

I would like to be more intentional in this relationship.

*I want to have a relationship that mirrors what the Holy Spirit
wishes for me and for you.*

In such a relationship, you might make a covenant with this new Spirit
friend.

In such a relationship, you will be open, mutual, intentional and constantly seeking the good will of the other and others

for you have now stepped into a life guided by the Holy Spirit and her holy fruit of love.

An example of this sort of friendship is in the story of Jonathan and David in 1st Samuel. There we see the great warrior and son of Saul, Jonathan, and the King of Israel in a bond defined by the very willingness Jesus speaks of with the disciples –

one in which Jonathan and David would willingly die for the other, lay down their lives for the other.

Jonathan and David are brought together by the strange and unusual circumstances God creates for all of us so we might become the people God wishes us to be.

In 1 Samuel 18, we read something of the spiritual friendship St. Francis de Sales is speaking of when the story tells us:

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

David is sent out of his father's house to serve Saul, but before David leaves, Jonathan understands that the friendship of convenience and circumstance has now graduated into something more.

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.

Jonathan then gives over to David his robe, which is a symbol of his title and inheritance, and his armor, a symbol of all that protects and covers Jonathan.

The Holy Spirit in relationship seeks to create a foundation of the fruit of love in every aspect of our lives.

She brings us into relationships and provides opportunities to create friendships of

mutuality, openness, intentionality and unity

in such a way that the glory and love of God and Christ

manifest and shine throughout the world.

We are provided opportunities by the Holy Spirit

to covenant with one another

and give over all that we value to another

and finally share the depths of our souls with this *soul friend*,

as the Celtic Christians call it.

When we do this we truly are becoming Ambassadors for Christ.

Our relationships, not just with the soul friend, but with everyone, become defined by *cordiality*: affairs of the heart defined by the relationship between God, Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Our relationships reflect what is called *mutual correspondence*,

wherein friends love one another,

know they love one another

and have a relationship filled with communication

and intentional familiarity with one another¹

¹ From an article entitled *Spiritual Friendship in Salesian Spirituality* by Alexander T. Pocetto, OSFS. Found online at web1.desales.edu/assets/salesian/PDF/PocettoFriendship.pdf. Accessed 6/6/12.

Mary and Elizabeth provide us an image to hold in our minds of what it means to live out the fruit of love in our relationships with one another,

what it might look like to live out a soul friendship,

a relationship pregnant with the presence of Christ.

We, as people of God, need –

desperately, I believe –

opportunities for the Holy Spirit to fill us.

For in being filled with the Holy Spirit we know ourselves to be enfolded and held by the love of God.

And in being filled with the Holy Spirit

we begin to love as the Trinity loves.

St Francis de Sales says:

*“From all eternity there is in God an essential communication by which the Father, in producing the Son, communicates his entire, infinite and indivisible divinity to the Son”*²

This is how God shared his love with us,

by sending his only Son for our sake

and for the sake of all creation,

so we might be reconciled to the love of God,

a love already expressed in the relationship

God shares with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The invitation is powerful and all-encompassing.

Mary is our example:

May it be unto me according to thy Word, O Lord.

Make me into the person you wish me to be by letting me be in relationships of reconciliation.

Living by the Spirit means being open in the ways of Mary.

Mary moves from

fear to assurance,

from confusion to trust,

from the potential of exclusion by friend and family alike to

mutual, open, intentional relationship unified

by a constant desire to follow God's will in all things.

We know the fruit of love is present when we are seeking reconciliation in all our relationships.

We know the Holy Spirit is present when our relationships begin to mirror the likeness we share with God from the very beginning of creation.

As a follower of Christ, I invite all of us to seek out these Spirit-filled relationships.

I invite all of us to reflect on relationships we have had in the past with friends and families and find moments which invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit.

² Ibid.

Where have you been like Mary,
a carrier of the presence of Christ,
an Ambassador for Christ's sake?

Where has a friend brought you the presence of Christ,
like Mary to Elizabeth.

As a follower of the Holy Spirit, I invite us to seek those moments out,
and then to become open and intentional about them in such a way
that the fruit of love,
the presence of the Holy Spirit fills
all the empty spaces,
the dark places,
the injured and wounded parts of our being,
so we might all be reconciled to the love and
care of the One God
who loves and created each of you.

Let us pray:

*O Holy Spirit, you draw us together into families, friendships,
communities and churches. May we be open vessels to receive the
fruit of love God intends for each of us. May we be like Mary, an
ambassador for your Son, Jesus Christ. May we have the courage to
seek out friendships of cordiality and covenant, like Jonathan and
David. May the communication of unity and mutuality you have with
God and Christ, be true also for us as we seek to do your will and
follow your designs for our lives and relationships. It is for your glory
and your love we live, in Christ's name. Amen.*