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## **The Many Works of the Spirit**

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On the Solemnity of Pentecost, the Church celebrated once again the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the earth. From my personal vantage point as bishop, I can say that I have seen the Spirit at work in a wonderful variety of ways in the life of our local Church.

Over the last several weeks, I have had the opportunity to travel throughout the diocese to administer the sacrament of Confirmation in our parishes. Confirmation is, of course, the preeminent sacrament of the Holy Spirit, and it is nearly impossible to be unmoved as our young people step forward to receive the sacramental anointing. Their eagerness is heartwarming, even when it is mixed with a bit of nervousness. In these admittedly challenging times, it is so important for these youngsters to have the grace of the Spirit as they grow into adolescence and young adulthood. The gifts of the Spirit - wisdom, fortitude, piety, and the rest - are essential graces that enable all of us to live in Christ and grow as his disciples. It has been delightful to give the sacrament of Confirmation to hundreds of our young people, knowing that the Holy Spirit will be active in their lives as they grow up. But, of course, the gifts of the Spirit cannot be taken for granted. They must be protected and nurtured by parents, families and parish communities. We all have a responsibility to help these young people keep the faith alive even after they receive this great sacrament of the Spirit.

Another beautiful manifestation of the life-giving Spirit came at the annual celebration of Easter. In parishes throughout the diocese, many men and women received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Holy Eucharist as new members of the Church. As I presided at the Easter Vigil in the Cathedral of St. Mary, I was touched by the spirit of joy and peace that I saw in the faces of those who received the sacraments for the first time. And, it was clear to me that the Holy Spirit was present and active in the Church, first by opening their minds and hearts to the truth of the Gospel, and then by gently drawing them into the embrace of the Church. And even now, I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit is already touching many other souls; helping them to experience the mercy and love of Jesus our Savior, assisting them in their own journey of grace and conversion and preparing them for their own reception into the Church.

The day of ordination is always a joyful occasion in the life of a diocese. On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, I had the privilege of ordaining two fine young men as transitional deacons, and now they are spending the summer in parish assignments, receiving some of the pastoral experiences that will help them prepare for their ordination as priests next year. Once again, the Spirit was powerfully at work in the ordination liturgy as Deacons Kyle Metzger and William Slattery were conformed to Christ himself, who came “not to be served, but to serve.” Through their diaconal ordination, they received the grace of the Holy Spirit in a particular way that will enable them to preach the Gospel, administer baptism, and serve the needs of God’s people in many other ways. With the help of our prayers and support, the Spirit will continue to bless these men with the grace they will need as they approach their ordinations as priests of Jesus Christ. And through the gentle working of the Spirit, we pray that other men too will hear our Lord’s invitation to “Come, follow me.”

These are just a few of the more noticeable signs of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church, but there are many others as well. As we celebrate Pentecost this year, hopefully we will be aware of the Spirit's presence in our own souls and promptly accept the grace that he offers. The Spirit is within us opening our minds to the truth whenever we read and pray with the Sacred Scriptures. The Holy Spirit constantly moves us to respond with generosity to our brothers and sisters in material or spiritual need. The Spirit is always drawing us to receive the grace of Christ in the sacraments, especially through participation in the Holy Eucharist at Mass and through the healing of reconciliation. And, the Holy Spirit never fails to show us new avenues for evangelization, new ways to offer the Gospel to those who await a relationship with Christ. Opportunities to share the faith are all around us. Perhaps, the Spirit is asking us if we have taken advantage of these opportunities and personally accepted the mission of evangelization given to the Church.

Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, calls all the faithful to be “spirit-filled evangelizers,” that is, evangelizers “fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Spirit made the apostles go forth from themselves and turned them into heralds of God’s wondrous deeds... The Holy Spirit also grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness in every time and place... Let us call upon him today, firmly rooted in prayer, for without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty.” By the grace of our baptism, and strengthened in confirmation with the Holy Spirit, each of us is called to be a “spirit-filled evangelizer.” Our daily prayers should certainly include a prayer to the Holy Spirit, asking for the grace and guidance to share the gift of faith with those we encounter in ordinary daily life. The work of evangelizing doesn’t belong only to the so-called professionals but is the work of all the faithful. And, if we are open to the gifts of the Spirit, who “helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26), we will never lack the grace we need to share the gift of faith, a gift we ourselves have received.

When St. John XXIII announced more than fifty years ago that he would call the Second Vatican Council, he stated his hope that the Church would experience a “new Pentecost,” a new experience of the Spirit’s grace given to the Church. Pope John rightly understood that the Church was facing new challenges and new opportunities for sharing the faith, and that the gifts of the Spirit would be needed more than ever. I pray that all the faithful in the Diocese of Fargo will experience anew the grace of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit that will allow us to live faithfully and joyfully in Christ.