

6th Sunday of Easter
May 29, 2011
Fr. Tom Elliott

The Bond of the Holy Spirit

Acts of the Apostles 8:5-8, 14-17

Psalm 66

1 Peter 3:15-18

John 14:15-21

I bonded with a drunken stranger at the grocery store one day. My sister had bought me some beer bread mixes from Pampered Chef. While I was at the grocery store, it dawned on me that I needed to buy some beer in order to make the bread. I grabbed a six-pack. When I went through the checkout lane, the cashier was too young to ring-up the beer, so she had to go and find a manager. As I stood there in my Roman collar, waiting for the manager to help me, I turned and noticed that a drunken man and his girlfriend (or wife) were waiting in line behind me. The man held a case of beer under his arm. He didn't seem to notice that I was buying a six-pack until a voice from behind us yelled, "What's the hold up? Is the priest buying beer?!" Let me pause my story here in order to properly thank that parishioner, who thought it would be funny to yell this at the grocery store!

The drunken man immediately saw the six-pack and some sort of bond was forged between us. He gave me a big smile and gently nodded his head in approval. I quickly finished paying for my groceries and headed to my car. As I was pulling away, the drunken man was emerging from the store. He triumphantly pumped his case of beer high into the air and shouted to me, "Yeah, man, yeah!" as if we were headed to the same party. While I felt embarrassed, he seemed to feel a tremendous bond with me.

Bonding is a powerful and essential element to every relationship. When two people authentically bond emotionally and spiritually, it builds trust, respect, and love. There are a lot of things in life that can cause us to bond to another person, such as sharing a hobby or interest, participating in a ritual, or sharing an intense experience (such as buying beer). One thing that causes bonding that we don't hear a lot about, though, is the Holy Spirit.

Our Scripture readings this weekend teach us about the Holy Spirit. In the first reading, we heard about the missionary journey of Philip and how Peter and John joined him in Samaria to pray over the new converts. We are told that the Apostles, "laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:17). Then, in the Gospel reading, the Holy Spirit was mentioned again. Jesus explained to His disciples that, even though they would no longer see Him on earth, He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them as their Advocate. In this way, they would *never* be alone; He would be with them *always*. The Gospel reading, in particular, reminds us of the *bonding power* of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria described the bonding power of the Holy Spirit very beautifully in his commentary on the Gospel of John, writing—

By receiving the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of union between us and Christ our Savior, those who are joined to him... share in his own nature. We now draw our life from Christ. By bestowing on them the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, the only-begotten Son of the Father, gives Christians a certain kinship with himself and with God the Father...

-Lib. 10, 2: PG 74, 331-334

The reason, then, why Christ sends the Holy Spirit upon His followers is because it unites us with Him in an intimate way. The Holy Spirit is like invisible superglue that bonds us to Christ in a bond so strong and profound that “those who are joined to him... share in his own nature.” This, in turn, slowly transforms us more and more into unique, particular images of Christ.

Have you ever noticed that when you hang around with other people for a significant amount of time you begin to pick up little aspects of their personality? When I visit my family members for extended periods of time, I return home saying things they would say. I pick up some of their characteristics simply by virtue of being around them for awhile. The bond of our shared time and activities together, affects us in a way that causes us to be more like one another. The bond of the Holy Spirit does the same thing for us regarding our relationship with Christ. It makes us more and more like Him. Saint Paul noticed this affect in his life.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul grew in his intimate union with Christ. He came to understand his life as being so closely bonded to Christ that he was able to express it in words like, “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me,” (Galatians 2:20) and “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). This is the call of Christ to all of us—to be in intimate union with Him through the powerful bond of the Holy Spirit. This is why Christ, in describing the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of His disciples, said, “you are in me and I in you” (John 14:20b).

As we continue our celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, let us thank Him for the gift of the Holy Spirit that intimately bonds us to Him in a life-changing and eternal way!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISE:

- ✚ Read Acts 2:1-13. In what ways did the Holy Spirit’s presence at Pentecost bond the people to God and to one another? In what ways have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? In what specific ways has it bonded you to Christ and others?