

VI, Easter, C, 2007

St. Raphael, Springdale, AR

You know it's very easy to tell when someone is filled with the Holy Spirit. I feel very fortunate to have personally met Mother Teresa. When you are with her, you feel uplifted, at peace, assured that God is near. Some of us had very saintly grandparents, who taught us to love Jesus and our faith. There are parishioners in this parish who exude the Holy Spirit by the way they live and how they love. They would also get on to me if I mentioned their names...so I'll go ahead and do it anyway. (Just kidding!) But as Catholics do you know who we believe is especially filled with the Holy Spirit? Our bishops are. You see, every time a new bishop is ordained the Holy Spirit is poured out abundantly upon that man. Being a bishop is not just about wearing a big hat, getting a fancy walking stick and eating first at receptions! It's about being an instrument of the Holy Spirit, an instrument like no one else. Mother Teresa once said that if a great saint got up and preached a moving sermon, that would be nearly as beneficial for us as if a bishop got up and preached by reading from the phonebook. I might try that next weekend! In other words, the Holy Spirit works through our bishops in a unique and powerful way; they are His instruments of choice.

In the first reading today we see the apostles, the first bishops of the Church, also making this same astonishing claim. Listen to how they respond to a problem in the Church. They say: "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities," and they go on to explain what they mean. But did you get a load of what they just asserted? Not only

do they claim to know **what** the Holy Spirit thinks, they even go so far as to speak **for** the Holy Spirit! I mean this is either the height of arrogance and presumption, or, it's exactly how Jesus has established His Church. As we know which it is. You see, back in John 14 Jesus promised His apostles (His bishops) that He would send them the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. Well, we see the Holy Spirit doing exactly that in Acts 15. The bishops are the instruments of choice for the Holy Spirit.

You know, Catholic bishops, especially here in the United States have come under a lot of fire in recent years. Most Catholics still wince when we hear the term, "pedophilia," because it reminds us of the negligence of some of our bishops. So, some of the criticism was justified. But shortly before he died, Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote his autobiography, called *Treasure in Clay*. In that book he candidly admits mistakes he made as a bishop. But, as the title suggests, even though the earthen vessel was clay, meaning the human instrument, nevertheless, inside was a great treasure, that is, the Catholic faith. In other words, even though the Holy Spirit uses lowly, sinful men to be His instruments, we should not forget the treasure they transmit: our precious faith. The Holy Spirit doesn't make our bishops perfect, but He does make them effective, because they are His instruments of choice.

Do you know what the 4 "marks" of the Church are? They are not Mark Bazyk, Mark Zimmerman, Mark Moses and Mark Barnes! No, the 4 "marks" of the Church are the fact that it is "one" "holy" "catholic" and "apostolic." And did you catch that last one? It is apostolic. "Apostolic" means that our faith come

from the Apostles, and that faith is handed down century after century by faithful bishops. Our bishops are the successors of the 12 Apostles; they are an essential part of the Church's divine constitution. Last week a reporter interviewed me regarding the lack of a bishop in our diocese. She asked me if I thought it was very important to have a bishop, or if anyone even noticed. I said: "Lady, are you kidding me?! A diocese without a bishop is like a body without a head. We're like chickens running around with our heads cut off. We lack a leader, a vision, a clear sense of direction." Of course, living in Springdale, I would use the analogy of chickens! Folks, our bishops are not merely ceremonial figure-heads who look good in Confirmation pictures and who we'd like to bless our rosaries! They are the hand-picked successors of the Apostles. They are the ones we should look to for guidance on matters of faith and morals: to know what to do about abortion and euthanasia, protecting the environment and global warming, immigration and the war in Iraq, in-vitro fertilization and sterilization, poverty and politics. If we don't look to their leadership, then we're little better than chickens running around with our heads cut off! Catholic bishops, these weak vessels made of fragile clay, carry within them the precious treasure of our faith, and they are the Holy Spirit's instruments, par excellence.

I would invite you to pray daily that Pope Benedict will soon appoint a new bishop to our diocese. May that man be full of holiness, wisdom and have the heart of Christ. But most importantly, may he be a responsive instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

Praised be Jesus Christ!