

14 Ordinary A 2008
St. Raphael, Springdale, AR

Have you ever noticed how different Catholic churches have a different spirit? You feel different when you're in one than you do when you're in another. Where does that spirit come from? I believe it comes from the pastor. If the pastor has a positive, joyful, and optimistic spirit, the people will often have the same. If, on the other hand, the pastor has a negative, sad or pessimistic spirit, then the people will share that also. Just think for a moment about the pastors you have know in other parishes – of course, we have great pastors here at St. Raphael's! But in these other parishes, didn't the people often reflect a spirit and attitude similar to that of the pastor? I remember one grumpy priest saying to me: "You know, it would be great being a priest, if it wasn't for all the people!" Obviously, he didn't get many invitations to supper! John Maxwell, a foremost expert on leadership, argues that our attitudes and spirits are infectious. He writes: "People catch our attitudes just like they catch our colds – by getting close to us." You see, parishioners catch the attitude and spirit of their pastor, and we all catch the spirit of those we spend time with.

In the second reading today St. Paul is telling the Romans to catch the Spirit of Jesus. Listen to how Paul puts it. He says: "You are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not dwell in him." In other words, we either have the spirit of Jesus and

that Spirit runs our lives, or the cravings of the flesh are what rule our lives; it's always one or the other. And so, St. Paul is urging the Romans to catch the spirit, the attitude, the outlook of Jesus, just like parishioners catch the spirit and attitude of their pastor.

I recently came across this little story that perfectly illustrates two very different attitudes toward the exact same thing. See if you can tell who has the Spirit of Jesus. Fred and Martha were driving home after Mass on Sunday. "Fred," Martha asked, "did you notice that the priest's homily was kind of weak today?" "No, not really," answered Fred. "Well, did you hear that the choir was flat?" "No, I didn't," he responded. "Well, you certainly must have noticed that young couple and their children right in front of us; with all the noise and commotion they made the whole Mass!" "I'm sorry, dear, but no, I didn't." Finally, in disgust Martha said, "Honestly, Fred, I don't know why you even bother to go to church!" By the way, Fred and Martha are not parishioners here at St. Raphael's! I think it's pretty easy to see in that example which spouse had caught the Spirit of Jesus, and which one was still "in the flesh."

Folks, let me invite you to do a little "spirit check" today. Ask yourself: "Have I caught the Spirit of Jesus?" Or, am I still "in the flesh"? One great way to catch the Spirit of Jesus is to spend time with Him in Adoration. A good priest friend of mine always reminds me to make a Holy Hour every day. He calls it his "Happy Hour." And you know, he is the

most joyful priest I know: he has caught the Spirit of Jesus because he spends time with Him. Another place you can sense the Spirit of the Lord is in the Food Pantry. You know, I am convinced that God has given us the poor so that we who are rich would make it to heaven by helping them. In that loving service to the needy, the Spirit of Christ comes to dwell in us. Do you know a surprising place to find the Spirit of God? In the high gas prices, that's right! This past week I was visiting a family who said the higher gas prices have actually turned out to be a blessing to them. Their family now eats supper at home almost every night because it's too expensive to go out to eat. They don't go on long vacations or to the movies as often and now they spend more time with each other at home. They are learning what it means to be a family again, and the Spirit of Jesus is present in their home. My friends, the Spirit of God is all around us, but so is the evil spirit of this world. Which spirit abides in your heart?

Folks, would you please pray for me as your pastor? Pray that the Spirit of Jesus may dwell in me, so that I can share that same Spirit with you. May what St. Paul says be true of St. Raphael parish: "You are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you."

Praised be Jesus Christ!