

Life in the Spirit

Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

Ascension Sunday 2020

Most Reverend Joseph Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Peace be with you! A number of years ago, I had the chance to visit one of our Catholic high schools for their recent academic accreditation. I was on the religion team visiting classrooms and speaking with students. A set of students told me about a very special club. It's called the "Sky Club." What is the "Sky Club" you may ask? "We're a club that plans alcohol and drug-free events," the student told me with great enthusiasm. I let this roll around in my head. A Catholic high school has a *special* club that organizes alcohol and drug free events?! I wonder what the other clubs are serving.



My antenna went up even as I patiently smiled, trying not to arch my eyebrows. And as I listened, I began to realize what a wonderful service these students were providing. Listening to him I realize that most folks didn't get into drugs or alcohol rather they walked into drugs and alcohol – sometimes by accident – and that the "Sky Club" provides a place for folks to have a good time. "We're not a group," one student explained "that sits around talking about how we're alcohol and drug free. We're a group that plans activities together simply to enjoy each other's company." In short, their sobriety enhances their joy in life. Their sobriety helps them experience the full spectrum of life. Their sobriety helps them embrace love and friendship.

What those students are discovering in the "Sky Club" can be found in parallel fashion with every moral choice. Our Church's teachings on sexuality speak of a kind of relational sobriety. Marriage marks a sobriety of spirit where husband and wife find God in the ordinary rhythms, even the ups and the downs of daily life. The promise of celibacy taken by priests and religious provides a kind of relational sobriety demarcating a circle of love where no one has a prior claim on their heart and all can be welcomed as Christ. The promise of poverty for religious and simplicity of life for priests echoed in our wider church's commitment to social justice points to a sobriety that challenges us to look honestly and with integrity and ask, "What do we own and what owns us?"

The source of that sobriety IS the Holy Spirit. This is the very gift for which the apostles were enjoined to spread in our opening reading from the Acts of the Apostles: "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." How can we respond to the gift of the Holy Spirit in our own time?

Here's one possible response that comes to mind: At St. Edward parish, one of the three parishes and schools where I previously served as pastor, a booklet of gratitude from Catholic Relief Services arrived at our office. Distributed nationally, it told the stories of a dozen or so acts of love and mercy expressed during the recent tsunami tragedy devastating the coastlines of so many South Asian countries.

The booklet told the story of one of our students, a kindergarten child who'd brought \$247 dollars in cash to school for the victims of the tsunami. Thinking it was a mistake, our kindergarten teacher, Ms. Murphy, called home to the parent. The mom said that, no, it was no mistake; he wanted to give his entire life savings for the lives of others. What the booklet didn't say was that the parent came from Vietnam and came with nothing – nothing except the gift of God in her heart – and that was more than enough!

Not only was that child extraordinary but so was his mother. His mother had the wisdom to allow her child to give his all. As our emeritus Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI noted some years back, "Those who give only money give too little."

That mother is the measure of my service to all of you as Bishop of Yakima. God expects the same from all of us. God not only loves us. God expects us to be a witness of his love for others. God expects us to share his grace with others. God expects us to be a witness of his love and his grace to those around us – especially the poorest in our midst.

So, welcome to the "Sky Club." Welcome to that heavenly club leading us to follow Jesus and his Ascension. Welcome to a life of spiritual sobriety. Welcome to a life in the Spirit that frees you and sanctifies you to give your all to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Peace be with you!

Art: Christ Church Cathedral, High Street, Dublin, County Dublin, Ireland – Right stained glass rose window in the east wall of the passage to the Synod Hall (now Dublinia), depicting in its centre the Lord as Good Shepherd along with the Fruit of the Spirit, namely Love (inscription in centre), Joy & Peace (top inscription), and in clockwise direction: Longsuffering, Faith, Gentleness, Goodness, Meekness, Temperance in reference to Galatians 5:22-23, surrounded by medallions, depicting an angel carrying a scroll with the inscription Gloria in excelsis Deo (top, representing joy & peace), and then in clockwise direction: [Job](#) (upper right, representing long-suffering), [Jonathan](#) (lower right, representing faithfulness), [Ruth](#) (bottom, representing goodness and gentleness), [Moses](#) (lower left, representing meekness), and [John the Baptist](#) (upper left, representing temperance, see Matthew 3:4). Captioned by John Hardman Powell (1827–1895), executed by Hardman & Co.

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