

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

There is an ancient tradition that comes from the Creek Indians. According to this tradition, Tulsa, Oklahoma was named for old Tulsy Town in Alabama. Around 1828 the Native American inhabitants of Alabama were forcibly relocated to Oklahoma in the infamous “Trail of Tears”. On this sad journey Creek medicine men carried ashes from their sacred lands in the Old South to the new Indian Territory established by the United States government in Oklahoma. From those ashes which they had carried over 750 miles the medicine men kindled a new fire in their new home which was at Tulsa’s present site.

That reminds me of a somewhat similar trek that we read about in the Old Testament. The children of Israel were commanded to carry fire with them as they traveled with Moses from Egypt to the Promised Land. That fire was to remind them of God’s presence. Indeed, the fire on the altar of ancient Israel was kindled from Heaven, according to Leviticus 9:23-24—“Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. On coming out they blessed the people. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came forth from the Lord’s presence and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. Seeing this, all the people shouted with joy and fell prostrate.”

The fire that appeared above each of the disciples on Pentecost was the same fire. After all, these followers of Jesus were the new Israel—the new bearers of the ancient flame that manifests the Presence of God. My Sisters and Brothers in Christ, that is who we are today.

In proclaiming that Jesus is Lord we testify to the truth that the Holy Spirit, the living presence of God in the world today, has come upon us, and, indeed, dwells within our very being.

That living presence of God dwelling within us makes us different. Each of us has, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts that have been given to us, according to St. Paul, for some benefit for the common good.

Unfortunately, too many us, if I may borrow a metaphor of the Lord’s, hide the light of the fire of the Holy Spirit within us, under a bushel basket. For whatever reason, and there are millions of them, we excuse ourselves from allowing the Fire of the Presence of God, the Holy Spirit, to come forth and be used for the benefit it is intended.

But, rather than dwelling on the negative, I would like to accentuate the positive by proposing for your consideration how some among us have put their spiritual gifts to work for the benefit of all. The examples I offer are not exhaustive nor are they meant to embarrass anyone or hold them up as exemplars of perfection. They are really people just like the rest of us who have chosen to allow the Holy Spirit to use them for the sake of others.

Immediately recognizable to all is our Music Director, Joanne Cardine, who has not allowed her years-long battle with cancer deter her from exercising her spiritual gift of music that has benefited us all. Please pray for her as she is now undergoing a very difficult form of chemotherapy. I think of her every time someone says that he or she is too old or too sick or too tired to assist in the work of the Church. Though her family and doctors asked her to cut back on her commitment, she simply cannot do it because of the burning desire within her to serve.

Then, there is young Adrianna McCaw, just now becoming a high school senior, who has been given beautiful gifts of music and song. Like so many young people today, she has school commitments, family responsibilities, and an active social life, but, when needed to cover for Joanne because she's too sick to play keyboard or no other cantor is available, Adrianna joyfully steps forward to provide whatever is needed. There have been many weekends when she has covered Masses at 5:00 and 8:00 and 11:00. She recognizes that her spiritual gifts were given to her by the Spirit who lives within her for the benefit of others, and the joy that is so obvious when she plays or sings enlivens the Spirit of all around her.

There are also the quiet, unseen apostles of joy like Noreen Tracey who wanted to be a Eucharistic Minister. However, you'll never see her serving at any Masses. Rather, she has been called to minister to the sick and the shut-ins in the parish. Each week, even while holding down a full-time job and taking care of her home, she finds time to bring the Eucharist to many, filling their homes and their lives with the peace of Christ that flows so effortlessly from her own gentle warmth. And there's Jean Moulder who seems to know everybody's birthday and anniversary and manages to send a greeting and peace for every joyful and sad occasion in peoples' lives. There is also the whole team of people that I dare not try to name because I might forget someone who make themselves available to prepare and serve our funeral luncheons who do it with such grace that visitors are in awe of the love they see at work in our parish.

Scott Cresmer is our go-to guy if there is a problem with sound equipment or air-conditioner units or almost any other electrical or electronic problem we encounter. For years he has given up weekends to set up sound and lighting for our youth retreats. Oh, and he is also always on-board to be our official photographer for the great Sacramental events in our parish, like First Communion and Confirmation. He knows that he has been gifted to serve, and never hesitates, even though he has to hold down a 12-hour a day job to provide for his home and family. His is an unparalleled "Servant's Heart".

Finally, there is Bill Mann, who is variously known as the president or the chairman of our Pastoral Council. But, in a sense, that is the least of what Bill does. He fills in wherever needed, be it the Craft Fair or one of our youth ministries. He spearheads the publication of our newsletter, OLC Connection, and loves singing in our Choir, not because he has a

great voice. He just loves to sing. He has also found within the Choir a truly loving fellowship which enhances the joy of worship for all of us, while bringing him great happiness. He is also an avid golfer, but sees even this recreation as a gift given to him for the benefit of others and there are literally generations of golfers he has taught in the Youth Golf program that he helped to initiate. But Bill has another hobby, largely unknown until now. He enjoys making stained glass objects. For the past year he has worked on a “Pieta” that he has created to be unveiled this Sunday above the altar at the parish center. He does all this really joyfully, while maintaining his own business, and being a loving husband, father to three grown children, and a doting grandfather to his, I think, five grandchildren.

These are just a handful of stories I could tell which speak of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our midst. I tell these stories to encourage those among us who truly believe Jesus is Lord that you too have been given the manifestation of the Spirit “for some benefit” for the common good. Please allow your spiritual gifts to shine forth for all to see to the glory of the God who dwells within us.

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

And from your celestial home shed a ray of light divine!

Come, Father of the poor! Come, source of all our store!

Come, within our bosoms shine.

You of comforters the best; You, the soul’s most welcome guest;

Sweet refreshment here below; In our labor, rest most sweet;

Grateful coolness in the heat; solace in the midst of woe.

O most blessed Light divine, shine within these hearts of thine,

And our inmost being fill!

Where you are not, we have naught, nothing good in deed or thought, nothing free from taint of ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew; on our dryness pour your dew; wash the stains of guilt away;

Bend the stubborn heart and will; melt the frozen, warm the chill;

Guide the steps that go astray.

On the faithful, who adore and confess you, evermore

In your sevenfold gift descend;

Give them virtue’s sure reward; give them your salvation, Lord;

Give them joys that never end. Amen. ALLELUIA!!!