

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Imagine! In this sermon Peter preached on that first Pentecost and 3,000 people came to believe in Jesus! I preach and people snore or read the church bulletin or text on their phones. Well, okay, not all of you, but some of you do, and now you know, I see you. I must be doing something wrong.

So, this morning I'm going to take a lesson from Peter. When "Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed: 'Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified,'" the people asked, "What are we to do?" Peter then told them three things that they needed to do—REPENT! BE BAPTIZED! RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT!****

So let's take a look at these instructions. What does it mean to repent? Unfortunately, too many of us think it means that we only need to be sorry for our sins. Actually, it means far more. It means a total change of life or attitude or behavior. It means to turn yourself around and take a profoundly different direction.

If I may, please allow me to offer you a couple of examples of true repentance that I experienced this past year. A member you will soon read about in our upcoming newsletter came to see me some months after his wife had died. He was being swallowed up by his grief. All joy had gone out of this life. Though his children and grandchildren reached out to him and tried to console him, he found no comfort. I listened to him and felt his pain acutely. I asked him what he did when he got up in the morning and he said, "Not much. I turn on the TV or read the paper, lose interest, and just sit there feeling depressed.

I suggested to him that it might be good if he got up and got out with a destination in mind. I told him we celebrate Mass at the Church each morning at 8:30. "Why not come to church each morning?" He said he would think about it.

The next day he arrived at church and has been coming every morning ever since. His life has changed. His attitude has changed. Life once again has meaning for him. I won't give away his whole story. Shortly, you will be able to read about it yourselves in our newsletter in his own words. He is a man who has truly repented—turned his life around from painful loss to joyful inclusion.

Similarly, I ran into another member at WaWa early one morning. He told me about the emptiness he found in his own life and how humdrum it had become. Retired, he found nothing that gave meaning to his life. I asked him if he was an early riser and he said that he was. I then recommended to him that he also start his day by coming to daily Mass. He has, and he too never misses a day. His life too has changed. In the past he always seemed to have a frown on his face. Now, you rarely see Joe without a big smile. The joy of his

youth has been returned to him by coming to greet the Lord each morning. If you want God in your life, you have to be willing to change, that is, REPENT!

Peter then goes on to say, "...be baptized in in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." The baptism that Peter calls for is more than the ritual most of us experienced as infants. It is the baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus. We cannot lose sight of the fact that we were baptized into the death of Jesus. In his letter today, Peter gives us a sense of what that means.

He tells us, "Beloved, if you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps."

A friend of mine showed me what this meant. Many years ago he was the Chief Operating Officer of a large Fortune 500 company. The Chief Financial Officer was retiring and had to be replaced. The Chairman and Chief Executive Officer told Jimmy to find someone to replace the CFO. After an exhaustive search, he hired a wonderfully experienced person with a great resume. She had graduated at the top of her class from the Wharton School at the U. of Penn., had served in finance, both in government and a number of private companies. One day she came out of her office and encountered the wife of the CEO. Later that day, the CEO goes to Jim's office and tells him that he has to get rid of her. When he asked why, the CEO said, "My wife doesn't like the idea of an "N" (using the derogatory term for an African-American person) in the office. Get rid of her." Jim said, "You can't be serious. You don't mean that do you?" The CEO said, "Get rid of her!"

Jim went to the woman and told her what had happened. He told her that he would fire her, but also document exactly what had occurred and told her to get a lawyer and file a discrimination suit. When she left, Jim went to the CEO and resigned his own position.

The woman filed her suit. Jim testified on her behalf. And she won a multi-million dollar suit both against the company, the CEO, and his wife.

But the CEO exacted his revenge. He saw to it that Jim would never be hired again for an important position at any major company. He remained unemployed for more than five years. His wife suffered serious depression and had to be hospitalized numerous times, and he was often left alone to raise their five children. Whatever savings they had acquired was eaten up by doctor and hospital expenses, because when he lost his job he had lost insurance for his family as well. Eventually he found work as an accountant at a much lower salary and managed to raise his family and care for his wife.

I asked him a year or so ago if he ever regretted what he had done. He said, "Not for a minute. It was the right thing to do. I would do it all over again." That's what Peter means when he says, "...if you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a

grace before God”. Jimmy showed me what it means to be baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ.

Finally, St. Peter tells us, “You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The Sacred Writer of the Acts of the Apostles tells us what happened when the 3,000 received the gift of the Holy Spirit: “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.”

I wonder how many here realize that’s what you’re supposed to be coming to church for—to learn, to become part of the community, to share in the Eucharist, and to pray. We Catholics are really good at the sharing in the Eucharist and the praying, not too many are taking time to learn their faith or to participate in the life of the community.

Recently I was reading about our Moslem sisters and brothers. One of the largest universities in the world is the Al-Azar in Cairo. This Muslim institution, with something like 21,000 students, requires every applicant to repeat the Koran from memory. Think about that for a minute. The Koran is about the same size as the entire New Testament. Three days are required to recite it. How well would any of us be at memorizing the entire New Testament? We Catholics are apparently not too adept at learning our faith. For some of us, just coming to Mass every weekend seems like it’s asking too much.

Finally, why is it so important to become an active member of the community of believers? One day I saw an older woman who had come to Mass early. She was sitting in the pew crying her heart out. I went and sat down beside her and asked her if I could help. She said, “No, Father. I’m okay. You see this is why I love to come to church. It’s the only place you can cry and no one asks you why. Sometimes I cry because I’m happy and sometimes I cry when I’m sad. It doesn’t matter. What matters is that I know that everyone here will accept me just as I am. That’s important to me.”

It’s important to all of us. We all need a place in our lives where we can trust others will accept us just as we are. The Church is the place where you can be loved just because you are here to worship and pray with us.

That’s what happens when you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. You become part of something greater than yourself, where you find acceptance and love and you give acceptance and love.

I have to confess that unlike Peter I will never preach a sermon that will bring 3,000 people to their knees and we are certainly not yet the church that God means for us to be. But this is the place where we have found God and this is where we share Him together. This is where we learn of his love and we worship Him and, like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, come to know Him in the breaking of the bread. This too is where we can find genuine community—to laugh together, love together, sing together, give thanks together,

share meals together, as we will at our Family Picnic this Sunday after the 11:00 A.M. Mass.

I hope each of us can commit ourselves to reaching out to people we know and invite them to this place so that we might add to the church everyone who needs Christ, as did those first 3,000. We need to do this, not for our glory, but so that we can spread the love of Jesus that we enjoy here throughout our community and throughout this world that so desperately needs such love.