

Yesterday the King family gathered in Falmouth Massachusetts to celebrate my uncle's 90th birthday. It felt good to be together with family—to reconnect with cousins and to meet new ones. It is so interesting to hear about each person's unique experience—what they're up to, what gives them joy. And it feels good to be with people who share the same heritage.

Today we come together because we share the same heritage—not by birth, but by baptism. Today we come together to celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the story as it is told by Luke in Acts, when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples, it filled the house where they were with a sound like that of the rush of a violent wind and it looked as if divided tongues like fire appeared among them. A tongue rested on each of them and each of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. It is an impressive story. The Spirit comes in unequivocal terms, definitively changing the band of friends into a joyfully confident bunch. They were joyful because of their experience of God's enduring presence. They were confident because of the strength that came to them to tell the story of who Jesus is to others in ways that they could understand. In this instance, it meant they were given the ability to speak in the languages of the people around them.

In John's gospel we hear about Jesus' promise that God would send the disciples the Paraclete. There is no English word that can give us the full meaning of Paraclete, which is why we just say Paraclete. It means the one who is God's presence among us—the one who exhorts, comforts, helps, and makes appeals on our behalf. The Paraclete is comforter, advocate and counselor all in one.

Then, we hear in Paul's letter to the Romans that all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Later, we will baptize Daisy Fae. We will recognize her as a child of God, which she is before any water even touches her. After she is baptized, we will also recognize her as a new member of Christ's body, the church. This is her

new identity, bestowed upon her by God's grace at work through our prayer in the Sacrament of baptism. She won't look different to us, even though she will be wearing the white garment symbolizing Christ's presence in her. But her identity will nonetheless be changed forever. She will be marked with oil in the sign of the cross. We will hear that she is sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. What we celebrate here today can never be undone. The mark of God's love and of her belonging is permanent.

According to the readings appointed for today, we are celebrating a spirit which we cannot see, but whose effects have been felt by people throughout the ages. From Acts, we understand that the Spirit empowers us. From Romans, we understand that the Spirit give us our identity as children of God, and from the gospel of John we hear that the Spirit is given to us to comfort us like a helper and advocate and to turn our fear into trust and our strife into peace.

The work of the Holy Spirit is the work of God in us and in the world. We cannot see the Spirit, but we can feel its effects. The Holy Spirit teaches us everything Jesus taught his disciples. She inspires us and enables us to hear the Word of God as a Word of life that cuts through the noise. She helps us to recognize how the printed words come alive in us and meet us in the deepest places of our need, enlivening us with a word of encouragement or healing or forgiveness or belonging, or whatever it is that we need to hear as a word of life for our bodies, hearts and minds.

So, even though I share a common heritage with the King family, and belong to that family, I also share a common heritage with you all, not through birth but through baptism. With you, I am a child of God. You and I belong to to a community gathered together not because of shared DNA but through our shared identity as those who were sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. We belong to a community gathered and built up by the work of the Holy Spirit. We didn't so much choose one

another as God chose us to be the recipients of God's love so that we would be empowered to go forth in this same Spirit and let our lives show forth the love God wants to share with all of humankind.

As we baptize Daisy Fae this morning, we baptize her without saying her last name. Her new identity as a member of Christ's body doesn't erase her membership in the clan of her birth, but she now belongs to a bigger family not divided by family differences or rivalries. She now belongs to a family marked by God's desire to include all of humankind in God's amazing desire to include all of us in the same life of love that is shared amongst the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Each time we baptize someone we are reminded of our own belonging, our own identity, and our own shared responsibility and privilege of helping each other to continually live more deeply into what it means to be loved by Jesus and to be called to join Jesus in his mission in the world. Today we celebrate the work of the Spirit in our midst. She gives us our identity as children of God. She comforts and encourages us and she empowers us to go forth into our daily lives by sharing God's love with everyone we meet.

As Paul so eloquently wrote to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things and do them.

Amen.