



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



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In the first chapter of his Gospel, St. Luke tells us that Jesus was conceived in his mother's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. His birth is praised in song by Spirit-filled people like Mary, Zechariah, Simeon. After being filled by the Holy Spirit at his baptism, he was driven by the same Spirit into the desert to be tempted. We will hear that story on the first Sunday of Lent. Then in the power of the Spirit he returned to his home town of Nazareth where in the synagogue on the Sabbath he publicly announced his Spirit-filled mission: to bring good news to the poor and proclaim liberty to captives. We heard last Sunday how the people received his proclamation with enthusiasm, but in the sequel that we have just heard, his own people are ready to kill him. What caused that violent change of attitude, so similar to the enthusiastic reception of Palm Sunday that would be followed so soon by the crucifixion of Good Friday?

First, he is too ordinary. Don't they know him? Isn't he the son of their neighbor Joseph? Who does he think he is, claiming to be the anointed of the Lord? So in our lives we can disdain to receive God in the familiar, the ordinary, a piece of bread, wine, water, oil, the hands and words of another human being. Surely God should come to us in more spiritual ways. That is the scandal of the Incarnation, that we must bow before material realities which God has made the bearer of spiritual ones, because he knows our nature, our need for the spiritual to be mediated by the material.

Secondly, Jesus has apparently made the mistake of working a few miracles in a neighboring town before doing so in his home town. His people are jealous, even murderously so, especially when Jesus underlines that God can work where he wills, and a sign of his graciousness is that he transcends our narrow boundaries. We need to be open to God's ways, not dictate to him our ways.

With a little reflection the people would have remembered that the men who spoke for God in the Old Testament were often not appreciated, even persecuted. The great prophet, Jeremiah, was told that in the face of crushing opposition God would have to make him "a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of brass, against the whole land, against Judah's kings and princes, against its priests and people," for God would be with him to deliver him. Such is the fate of the one filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

The same Holy Spirit was poured out on this diocese and in this church this past week. On Monday our new bishop celebrated his first Eucharist in his cathedral, reminding us that bishops down the ages have been our link with Christ, that they are there to make him present in the Church today through the sacraments. On

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Wednesday Bishop Naumann celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for some 40 young parishioners, commissioning them to accept the Spirit of Christ into their hearts so as to be his witnesses in the world.

The Spirit is actively at work in our Church, extending the saving mission of Christ, and his principal work in us, his ultimate gift is charity. What is the first word used by St. Paul to characterize that charity? Love is patient, he says. That means suffering, bearing with hardships for the sake of the beloved, accepting not always getting one's own way. It is kind, seeking to ease the burdens of others, it is not jealous of Capernaum when it receives God's gifts, it is not pompous, rude, puffed up, self-seeking—things he would not have mentioned if he hadn't known that we have tendencies to all those qualities. In bearing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things charity demonstrates the Spirit's gift of fortitude. All of these virtues are beyond human strength and effort, but they are the work of the Spirit of God in us, for "the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

That outpouring of the Spirit was the fruit of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus, which is about to be renewed on this altar. Just after the words of consecration, the priest will pray, "Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit and become one body, one spirit in Christ." The Spirit gives us the love which makes us the one Body of Christ. May I encourage you to join in this sacrifice wholeheartedly. Sing heartily praise to God as you offer in your heart the sacrifice of Jesus along with him, express your love and self-giving to God with a strong sung Amen as you ratify all the priest has said in the Eucharistic prayer. The more we participate in mind, heart and voice, the stronger will be our unity as the body of Christ, the stronger our common witness to Christ after we leave this church, the stronger our ability to bring his love into the world.