

Homily for the Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A

May 10, 2026

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 8:5-8, 14-17 (Philip evangelizes in Samaria.)

Responsory: Psalm 66 (Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.)

Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:15-18 (Be ready to give an explanation for your hope.)

Gospel: John 14:15-21 (I will not leave you orphans.)

In today's gospel, Jesus speaks to his disciples about the "Advocate," the "Spirit of truth," which he is going to give to them. Of course, we know that he's talking about the Holy Spirit. And so, our minds naturally leap forward to Pentecost, the great celebration of the Holy Spirit which will soon conclude the Easter Season. However, let's slow down a little bit and allow the rest of the Easter Season to unfold according to the liturgical calendar. For now, let's focus on the *promise* of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was making to his disciples, rather than the *fulfillment* of that promise, which would come later. For a moment, let's sit with Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper and ponder what this promise meant for them as the hour for Jesus' death and resurrection drew near.

Jesus says, "In a little while the world will no longer see me." That certainly is true. In less than 24 hours, he will be dead, and his body will be placed in a tomb. Though he will rise again and show himself to his disciples, he won't remain on this earth for very long before ascending to heaven. And once he's gone, the world will no longer see him in the flesh. However, his promise to his disciples is, "You will see me," even though the world does not. They will "see" Jesus, figuratively speaking, even after he has ascended to the Father, because, as he says, "You are in me and I in you." This seemingly impossible promise will be fulfilled through the action of the Holy Spirit. Though Jesus must leave his disciples physically, he will not leave them "orphans," abandoned by their Master and Teacher. Through the Spirit, they will feel his reassuring presence, his constant guidance, and his faithful love.

We know how essential that presence of Christ and his Spirit was to the first disciples in the early days of the Church. Throughout this Easter Season, we've been following their adventures in the Acts of the Apostles. We saw how they formed a community of believers, united not only by their shared faith in Christ, but also by their sharing in the *Eucharist*. Christ's presence in the sacrament was the glue holding them together and making them one body, one spirit in Christ. The Eucharist continues to hold us together, maintaining our communion with Christ and with each other, centuries later. We also saw how the Early Church began to develop new ministries, so that the needs of all could be met, without sacrificing the proclamation of the Word. Thus, even as Christ was proclaimed and taught by the Apostles, Christ's love was being shared in very concrete ways through the actions of other Christians who were filled with the *same* Spirit.

In today's first reading we saw an example of what happened after the persecution of the Church in Jerusalem and the martyrdom of Stephen forced the believers to scatter. They didn't just run away and hide. Quite the opposite! They dispersed and proclaimed Christ

wherever they went. They made Christ known to a much larger and more diverse audience by spreading the Gospel to new areas and new communities. Philip even had the audacity to preach to the *Samaritans*! Fortunately, his preaching was accompanied by signs and wonders, like unclean spirits coming out of people and paralytics being cured. Jesus worked these same miracles as he went about preaching the Good News. Now, it appears that he was doing the same for his apostles, working through *them* to spread his Word of salvation.

The Holy Spirit clearly was making its presence felt through Philip, but, for some reason, Philip did not invoke the Spirit as he baptized converts to the faith. Peter and John had to rectify the situation by going to Samaria and, in effect, finishing the job. The way the scene is described in Acts, it looks almost like a Rite of Confirmation, doesn't it? The chief presbyters from the Jerusalem community come to pray over the newly baptized and lay hands on them so that they may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is how the people of Samaria, and all newly baptized Christians, would feel the presence of the Risen Christ in their midst. *Through the ministry of the Church*, both its teachings and its rituals, believers would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and experience its power dwelling within them. That Spirit would remain with them forever, animating every *individual* believer and every Christian *community*. And that remains the case even to the present day. The same Spirit of Christ lives in us, moving us to *live the Gospel* each and every day, and it is manifested even more powerfully in the worshipping community which gathers together in the name of Christ.

We're all familiar with the concept of "proclaiming" the Gospel by our actions, rather than our words. St. Francis of Assisi famously instructed his friars to go out and proclaim the Gospel and use words "if necessary." But, in his First Letter to the faithful of the Church, St. Peter encourages us to be more vocal about our faith. He says, "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope." That's easier said than done. Have you ever tried to teach someone else something that you don't understand completely yourself? The moment you try to articulate what you know, you immediately realize how incomplete your knowledge of the subject is. You fumble around awkwardly, searching for the right words, trying to make clear what suddenly seems a lot fuzzier in your own mind than it did a few minutes ago. This is why we need to *reflect* on our faith. We need to *ponder* the mysteries that God has revealed to us, rather than just accepting them as true.

The Liturgy of the Word helps us to do that type of reflection. Many people are content just to gather every Sunday to pray and break bread together. For them, it's enough to share in the Mystery of Christ without reflecting too deeply on what happens here. But the Lord invites us to do more than that. He calls us to hear his Word and let it nourish us, as well. He opens our hearts *and our minds*, that we may grow in faith *and understanding*. Thus, we will be better equipped to share our faith with others, who may not have been blessed with the same experiences of Christ that we have enjoyed. St. Peter encourages us to share our faith "with gentleness and reverence." Let us do so, confident that the Holy Spirit will teach us and guide us and make our efforts fruitful.