

**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter      April 29, 2018      St. Agnes Church**

When was the last time you were under the influence?  
 Before you get the wrong idea and assume I talking about the consumption of alcohol...  
 which I'm not.....  
 I'm speaking here of spiritual matters.  
 When was the last time you were under the influence of the Holy Spirit?

There are signs, indicators.  
 The early church, the church that was forming soon after the resurrection of Jesus Christ  
 expanded, grew in numbers,  
 because the believers were under the influence of the Holy Spirit.  
 The scriptural translation we have says that the increase in membership  
 was because of the consolation of the Holy Spirit.  
 The word consolation just doesn't capture what was happening.

The Holy Spirit stirred up the hearts of the people in the community.  
 And surely they turned to the Holy Spirit for help, for assistance.  
 They called upon the Holy Spirit in prayer.  
 And because the Spirit gave them encouragement and enlightenment,  
 their witness to the Risen Lord touched many hearts.

The Holy Spirit has the power to overcome their fears, has the power to make them bold.  
 Inspired by the Holy Spirit, there is authority behind the words of the Gospel.  
 God is speaking to the world through the members of the community...and people are listening.  
 This in turn creates a desire for baptism and membership in the community.  
 People are repenting, turning away from their previous lives  
 and embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.  
 Many came to believe in the power of God.  
 Many came to believe in the love of God.  
 Many were converted, many were baptized and their numbers grew.

I need to say a few words at this point about wooing.  
 Not wooing as in woo-who!  
 Wooing as in "winning someone's heart, winning their loyalty....

...a company may woo a potential high quality employee;  
 ...a team may woo a proficient, expert player;  
 ...commercials woo buyers to consider trying a certain product.  
 There's romantic wooing where you try to grab and win the attention of someone you like.

But there's no one who woos as good as God woos.  
 God's intention, God's motivation, God's mission is to woo human beings,  
 to win their hearts by the height and depth and length and breadth of his everlasting love.

And this brings us back to why the early church continued to grow.  
 Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, theirs is a wooing proclamation of the Gospel.  
 The first Christians were giving zealous witness to the splendor of God's love.  
 In word and deed they were offering to the world the everlasting love of God.  
 That's what salvation is.  
 The Lord longs for people to respond to the outpouring of his love.  
 The Lord longs for people to love him in return with all their heart.

One response to God's wooing  
 is to sing in joy, to sing without restraint, without self-consciousness...  
 It is to sing at the top of our voice  
 even though we may be tone deaf and can't carry a tune.  
 It's to sing because something has changed in our heart;  
 something wonderful has been added...  
 we've become conscious of the extent of love God has for us.  
 It is the hope that by this divine wooing,  
 the hearts of people will be won over to Him,  
 won over to friendship but even more than friendship.  
 One of the most profound responses to the love expressed and given to us is...commitment!  
 God says "I know my people love me when they are willing to commit to me."  
 And that's what was happening in the early Church  
 People were willing to make the commitment...  
 even to the point of martyrdom...giving their lives for the good of the church.

The hope of God's wooing  
 is that people will recognize His voice  
 and be willing to open the door to their hearts and let God's presence in,  
 let God's love enter and dwell there.  
 When we think of the reign of God we think of a throne in a castle...  
 that exists in the Kingdom we hope to one day enter.  
 I encourage us to think a little differently.  
 God wants to reign right now in our hearts and over our hearts.  
 Imagine that glorious throne of God is in your heart.  
 God wants to reign over us from within our very own heart.

Another element of God's wooing love is longsuffering.  
 He patiently waits for people to repent, undergo conversion, and turn toward him in love.  
 He offers forgiveness and mercy as a way to restore people to a right relationship with Him.

As a side note, in the Old Testament,  
 God's people got into trouble when they started blending worldly ways that they liked  
 into their religion.  
 They started making allowances and exceptions  
 based on what seemed to be innocent practices and behaviors.  
 These worldly ways get mixed together with God's ways  
 and then are treated as having equal value. This is called syncretism.

Today it might happen if and when someone blends Catholic Church beliefs and practices with superstition, or with some popular philosophy.  
Eventually God will bring judgment on such allowances that we might be restored to purity of heart.  
God wants us all to himself even before we get to heaven.

Let us pray that God's wooing love will win over our hearts.  
Let us also pray that our living according to Gospel values will win other's hearts over to God.  
Good things await us in heaven. God's love being one of them.  
Good things also await us as we embrace a Christian life.  
Let us live so as to win the hearts of unbelievers over to God's marvelous love.

Today's prayer: "O Lord, continue to pour out Your love upon us. Help us embrace this love and make it the center of our lives. May it transform us into the image of Jesus Your Son. May it win the hearts of non-believers over to Your ways. Amen!"