

Homily: May 23, 2022

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

As we come to the Ascension, we are nearing the end of this Easter season. We hear stories of Jesus preparing his disciples for serious challenges and persecution. Simultaneously the first readings from Acts reveal such challenges happening from within the church and from society. Jesus is therefore calling us to trust the guidance of God's Holy Spirit. We acknowledge that we often don't take the time and silence to hear God's spirit speaking from deep within.

These past days Jesus has been introducing us to the presence and role played by the Holy Spirit, named this morning as the "Advocate." This helpful spirit of Christ can assist at times of challenge and threat so as not to "fall away" from the truth, or from our relationship with Jesus. Or as in the first reading, the Advocate "opened [Lydia's] heart to pay attention to what Paul was saying." That conversation led her and her household to being baptized AND extending an invitation for Paul and his companions to stay at her home."

Though it was not mentioned clearly, the Advocate had already helped Paul to pay attention to where people would gather, making such conversations possible—"along the river where [Paul] thought there would be a place of prayer. We spoke with the women who had gathered there."

One basic calling coming to us from this morning's readings is for us to allow the Spirit to guide us into all kinds of encounters and chance conversations where people may speak about the deeper or deepest aspects of their life. Often in planes, trains and other chance meetings, we have had memorable and surprisingly deep conversations with people often touching upon religious matters or deep struggles.

My sister-in-law worked with a minister's wife in Avon, Minnesota to set up a very successful "The Gathering Grounds" coffee shop near the interstate exit to that town. Their goal was to simply enable or invite such conversations. They believed that in one way or another, the Spirit is hard at work prompting people to seek God seek true love which we know is the basic truth our lives. Hopefully, in well-intentioned conversations, people will hear the true Spirit and gradually give up

any misguided and unhealthy ways and choose ways of connecting which are true to what our God of love wants.

Jesus, Paul, Lydia and many other since then have followed the guidance of God's Holy Spirit and accompanied many people deeper and deeper into a fruitful relationship with God. Such conversations are essence of our ministry of Spiritual Direction, jail ministry and accompaniment at the Veteran's Treatment Court. May we be attentive to that same Advocate, while sipping coffee with a friend or relative or stranger and in any other moments of providing hospitality to others.

"The Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, will testify to me. And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning."