

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
23 September 2018

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20
Psalm 54
James 3:16-4:3
(see 2 Thessalonians 2:14) Mark 9:30-37

People of Epiclesis

Last year my eight-year-old nephew began playing flag football, but he was really looking forward to this year, when he would be big enough to play the real deal: tackle football. Last Saturday I had my first chance to watch him play in a game. I've been a football fan most of my life, and I especially enjoy watching college football. But this was my first time watching peewee football.

I quickly learned that in peewee football, there are usually only one of three things that will happen on a particular play. Most often: a hand off to the running back, who runs into the line for no gain. Pretty often: there's some kind of fumble that happens, whether on the snap or the handoff, followed by several players from both teams diving after the ball. Finally, every so often: what at first looks a lot like the first type of play, the running back runs into the line, and then suddenly bursts through the pack and continues running for a fifty-yard touchdown.

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My nephew plays along the defensive line, so his job is to clog up the line and chase after the quarterback or running back when he can. Most of the time, unless the ball carrier runs in his direction, he's not directly involved in the play. Play after play, he does his job, without getting much notice.

But, since he's my nephew, I was watching him every single play. And as I watched him, there was something about him that I *did* start to notice. At the end of each play, he was

always quick to get up, and then quick to go around to his teammates, patting them on top of the helmet and offering encouragement for the next play.

I assume the coaches have taught this to the players as a habit; as an important part of getting ready for the next play. No matter what happened on the previous play; or where the ball is on the field; or what the score is in the game; all that matters is getting ready for the next play. And an important part of getting ready for the next play means patting one another on the head and, in a sense, calling down a positive spirit for your team.

And in all the ways that football can be complicated, trying to get eleven players to execute an intricately-designed play, this habit of patting one another on the helmet is so simple. It's so simple and so practical. You don't have to be a star quarterback to pat a teammate on the helmet and encourage him or her for the next play. It's something that any player can and should do to help his or her team. And these simple and practical habits are often the hidden foundation that makes possible the success of the complicated plays.

And that's what it takes in a tough sport like football. There's no time for dwelling on the previous play, because the next play is about to begin. Even if the previous play was a fumble, an interception, or a missed tackle. Even if the opponent is on the one-yard line and your backs are against the end zone. You can't let a spirit of negativity or disappointment or frustration stay with you and keep you down. You have to call upon a spirit of positivity and encouragement to make it through the next play; to make it through the game. It's just the practical and wise thing to do – and every player has the power to do it, no matter his or her athletic ability.

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Throughout the month of September, we've been hearing from the Letter of James. He has also been giving us practical advice, that for being disciples of Jesus Christ. Teaching and reminding us that, in any way our faith can be mysterious or complicated, there is always a simple and practical part of it. There are always habits and practices that all of us can do as Christians; that aren't only meant for "super saints" to do.

Throughout this month, James has encouraged us to "be doers of the word and not hearers only," which means something very tangible and practical, like taking care of the vulnerable and those who need help.¹ Like welcoming all people into our community, regardless of their status.² Like demonstrating our faith with visible good works, such as giving clothing and food to the poor.³

These are all things that any of us can do. Things that are happening right now, here at Holy Family. Any of us can help provide supplies for our Saint Vincent de Paul Pantry; make dinner for our New Bethlehem Day Center or the other overnight shelters in our community; be a part of the Welcoming Ministry that greets people who come to Mass; invite a friend or neighbor to come to Alpha and learn about the faith.

These are examples of simple and practical ways that all of us are called to be as disciples of Jesus Christ. These are the habits that will help us grow in our faith; help others grow in their faith; and help all of us be successful as a team of disciples.

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Now, today, James offers us more practical advice about being a Christian. There are many negative spirits that prowl about the world. James lists some of them: jealousy, selfishness, conflict, covetousness, anger, fighting, envy.⁴

My friends, we don't have to settle for any of those spirits. At our Baptism, we were all given the power to call upon the Holy Spirit to help us.⁵ Rather than settle for negative spirits, we have the power and ability to call upon the Holy Spirit from above: purity, peace, gentleness, mercy, sincerity.⁶

Whenever we get knocked down by something in life, we have the power to call upon the Holy Spirit. We have the power to – like my nephew on the football field – pat one another on the helmet. Offer encouragement. Get ready for the next play. Leave a setback behind and not let it continue to affect us and hold us back.

Is this easy? Not all. Just like it's not easy for a football player to forget the previous play and fight for every single yard on the next play. But the more we practice it – the more we make it our habit to call on the Holy Spirit – the easier it becomes.

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I've preached before about St. Teresa of Ávila, a 16th-century Spanish Carmelite nun, mystic, and Doctor of the Church. She wrote about her own experience of dealing with negative spirits.⁷ She warned that the assaults of negative spirits come and “keep us in [fear], because we expose ourselves to [their] assaults...by our attachments” to our sins.⁸ She learned that by trusting in the authority of Jesus – rather than in our own power – we do not have to fear the negative spirits. From then on, whenever she saw the negative spirits, she “was never again afraid of them – on the contrary, [she was amazed that]⁹ they seemed to be afraid of [her]. ...[And] with...authority over them, given by the Lord,” the negative spirits were nothing more than flies that she could shoo away.¹⁰ The lesson for us is that negative spirits are *afraid* of us when we *do not fear them*.¹¹ Negative spirits flee when we call down the Holy Spirit from above.

One of the most important ways in which we can help ourselves turn away from negative spirits is to make good, regular confessions. Now, in Confession, I won't pat you on the head like my nephew does to his teammates. But, if it's helpful, you can think of the prayer of absolution with my arms out stretched as sort of like a spiritual pat on the head.

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In a few moments, during the Eucharistic Prayer, I will extend my hands over the gifts, the altar server will ring the bells, and I will call down the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine, so "that they become the Body and Blood of...our Lord Jesus Christ."¹² This is called the *Epiclesis* – the "calling down" of the Holy Spirit.¹³ And when we receive the Eucharist, we become strengthened in our ability to call down the Holy Spirit in our own life. We become "People of Epiclesis."¹⁴

When we receive the Eucharist today, let's commit ourselves to being disciples who call down the Holy Spirit – not just here in the Mass – but every day and in all parts of our lives.

¹ James 1:22, 27

² James 2:1-5

³ James 2:14-16, 18

⁴ James 3:14-16, 4:1-2

⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 1266

⁶ James 3:17-18

⁷ Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), also known as Saint Teresa of Jesus: Spanish Carmelite, initiated discolored Carmelite movement, prolific spiritual and mystical writer, first woman Doctor of the church [1970].

Proclaimed Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI, 27 September 1970.

⁸ Teresa of Avila, Ch XXV: *Divine Locutions – Delusions on that Subject* (para. 26)

⁹ See Mark 1:27

¹⁰ Teresa of Avila (para. 25)

¹¹ See Mark 6:50: "But at once [Jesus] spoke with them, 'Take courage, it is I do not be afraid!'" (also see Matthew 14:27 and John 6:20)

¹² *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer III No. 109

¹³ *Epiclesis* (ἐπίκλησις): from Greek *epi* + *kaleo* (ἐπί + καλέω); to call down upon

Strong's Concordance G1909: *epi* (ἐπί): "a primary preposition; properly, meaning superimposition (of time, place, order, etc.), i.e. over, upon, at, on, towards, etc."

Strong's Concordance G2564: *kaleo* (καλέω): "to bid, call (forth)"

From Adrian Fortescue, "Epiklesis" in *Catholic Encyclopedia: Vol. 5* (1909):

Epiklesis (Latin *invocatio*) is the name of a prayer that occurs in all...liturgies...after the words of Institution, in which the celebrant prays that God may send down His Holy Spirit to change this bread and wine into the Body and Blood of His Son.

¹⁴ Term borrowed from Bishop Liam Carey, Homily, Mass of the Holy Spirit. Mount Angel Seminary, St Benedict, Ore. August 24, 2015.