FR. GARY'S CORNER

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The first reading for this “Good Shepherd Sunday” presents St. Peter’s speech at Pentecost. It is a stirring speech made to the huge crowd of Jewish pilgrims from around the world who traveled to Jerusalem for the Jewish Feast (Shavuot).

Empowered by the Spirit, Peter gets up in front of all those devout Jews and boldly proclaims, “Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” When his listeners heard this, “they were cut to the heart and they asked Peter and the other Apostles, ‘What are we to do, my brothers?’”

Imagine suddenly coming to the awareness that you played a role in putting to death the promised Messiah. The people were understandably horrified. Peter tells them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins.” Peter goes on to tell them that baptism will bring them “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” He reminds them that this is the promise God has made to them and to their children and to all those far off.

We too, by our sins, play a role in the death of the Lord. It is through baptism that we first receive the blessing of which St. Peter speaks. In the waters of baptism our sins are forgiven, and we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Those blessings are completed in the Sacrament of Confirmation. So, you and I already have these gifts. The Lord has freely given them to us.

The question is, are we using the gifts we received? Do we embrace the baptismal identity that the Lord God bestowed on us on the day of our baptism? Do we claim the identity of a child of God and do everything in our power to live that awesome identity and heritage that God bestowed? God never imposes, He proposes and waits for our “yes”.

Sadly, like the Jews of old, we get caught up in the ways of the world and we forget the ultimate reason for our existence - life with God. We too have all too often “gone astray like sheep” but St. Peter reminds us that by our baptism we have “now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.” We are invited to look to the Good Shepherd, Jesus, and to embrace and use the spiritual gifts and blessings that we have been given as his baptized children and members of His flock.

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life,