

Giver of Life Confirmation Preparation 5

SERVICE

Pentecost is the Church's birthday. The Spirit sets the tongues of Jesus' followers afire with the good news that God has raised Jesus from the dead. They proclaim in many languages that Jesus is Lord. Peter gives a fiery sermon that stirs 3,000 people to change their attitudes, be baptized, and join the company of Jesus' followers (Acts 2.14-42).

All of us who believe in Jesus believe on the word of witnesses like Peter. The story of the Spirit's coming and Peter's first sermon comes from the sequel Luke added to his gospel—the *Acts of the Apostles*.

Apostles are missionaries, witnesses to all the wonders God worked through Jesus and to the greatest wonder of all—his resurrection from the dead. Peter and 11 others who followed Jesus from the beginning and witnessed his resurrection are the first apostles. Many believe their word and hand it on. Down the centuries the Spirit has set afire the tongues of countless witnesses and missionaries who have brought the good news to us in our time.



The Spirit Sets Us Afire

After Jesus was lifted into heaven, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus; Simon, the Zealot party member, and Judas son of James went into Jerusalem to the upstairs room where they were staying. Together they devoted themselves to prayer. There were some women in their company and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his kin.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly from the sky came a noise like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where

they were sitting. Tongues, as of fire, appeared among them and rested on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign languages, as the Spirit prompted them.

Staying in Jerusalem at the time were devout Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard the sound, they gathered in a large crowd. They were bewildered because each one heard the believers speaking to them in their own language. Amazed and astonished, they asked "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"

Acts 1.12-14; Acts 2.1-8



✦ On whose word do you believe in Jesus?

✦ How do you show you believe in Jesus?



The Spirit Impels Us to Serve

The Spirit inflames, burns, impels, stirs, creates, prompts, moves, blows like a driving wind. The verbs that describe the activity of the Spirit are dynamic and powerful. The Spirit works in us to testify to our faith, to serve one another, to work for justice.

Preparing for confirmation is a process of becoming a fully committed member of the Christian community, sensitive to how the Spirit is moving in one's life. The Spirit moves us to wonder and awe, moves in us to make wise and fair decisions, moves in us to pray and thank God, moves in us to connect with others and build community. The Spirit also stirs us to serve one another and free people from injustice as Jesus did.

Service is a way of life for committed Christians. Matthew's gospel tells us we will be judged by our works of mercy. In Matthew 25.31-46 Jesus welcomes into the kingdom of God those who "when I was hungry, gave me to eat," those who "when I was thirsty, gave me to drink," and those who "when I was homeless, sheltered me." Matthew names six works of

mercy that call us to treat others, especially those in need, as we would treat Jesus himself.

Service is so basic to the way Christians live that parents, mentors, and teachers



instill the practice of service into our lives at an early age. Many teens serve others without recognizing their actions or their importance. Because a person has grown up always clipping the grass around the tombstones at the cemetery, he or she thinks this action is just part of everyday life, not service.

Confirmation programs help teens recognize the service they already do and also try out new ways to use



their talents and interests in making a needed difference to people

around them. Service can be picking up and disposing of garbage one sees lying around the neighborhood. It can be mowing an elderly neighbor's lawn every week or stopping to see if he or she needs an errand run.



Service can also be a more structured commitment such as visiting someone at a rest home, tutoring, serving meals to the homeless, or helping with a child care program that gives young mothers a break.

As teens

recognize the service they do makes a difference in others' lives, they gain strength in their commitment.



◆ What service do you do without thinking about it?

◆ What difference have you made?



◆ What talents have you learned to use in service?



The Spirit Urges Us to Work for Justice

happening to me? My body can't contain the level of suffering and pain that I feel. I don't understand where it's coming from.' I wanted to die. I just could not take it.

"At that moment, I heard in my head—I always say it was the voice of God—'When you were a young person, you asked me for my heart.' I had. I remembered when I was about 16 or 17 praying, 'God, give me your heart.'

"The voice said, 'This is a taste of my heart, just a small taste, because if you experience the pain in my heart for the young people in that community, you would die. It would consume you. But here is a taste of it so you know that you are called, that it doesn't come from you; it comes from me.'"

Against all she had been taught about being the Puerto Rican kid who gets out of the projects and succeeds, Alexie returned to her home community. She founded the Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice with a core of five young people.

Alexie admits she has a bleeding heart but values

her compassion. "From the very beginning when I was a child, I was very sensitive about the world. When I saw people suffering, dogs lost in the street, or an old person who

Alexie Torres Fleming

The Spirit impels us to continue the prophetic ministry of Jesus, to free people from evils that have gone on so long they have become part of the system.

Poverty, hunger, sexism, racism, and destruction of the environment are examples of such evils. Through the pain and anger that experience of these evils can cause, the Spirit stirs in us a passion for justice as the Spirit did in Alexie Torres Fleming.

"You're not everything that God wants you to be yet," a friend challenged Alexie during her years as a lobbyist and legislative advocate. "I know you think you are, but you're not."

In the 1980s when Alexie grew up, she heard the kid on the success track idealized. She studied psychology and nonprofit management at Fordham, began doing lobbying and legislative work, and moved to Manhattan. She wrote policy papers for Fortune 500 corporations on issues such as youth employment.

"I was making and spending a lot of money, traveling, living near the Empire State Building," Alexie recalls. "But I felt very disconnected.

I couldn't find the sense of community I experienced as a young person growing up at Holy Cross Parish in the Bronx."

In her mid 20s, a profound experience changed Alexie's life. She remembers awaking and sitting up in bed "just weeping, weeping, weeping in the middle



of the night and not knowing why. I kept seeing my community in the Bronx, its young people, and everyone around my home, but I saw darkness around them. I felt such a sense of anguish and agony that I thought I was going to die. I remember asking, 'God what is

couldn't walk, I cried," she says. "I used to think that was a weak thing, but someone told me our destiny in Christ is bound in the things that make us cry the most and that make us laugh the most. It's so true."

In high school Alexie participated in a Life in the Spirit seminar with her youth group. "We had baptism in the Holy Spirit," she remembers. "I was 16. My friends and I couldn't get enough of the Lord. We went to a park and stayed late, just praying. A friend's mother let us go into their attic. We read the bible and prayed everywhere we could for as long as we could; we just hungered for the Lord."

"In retrospect, this was a profound spiritual time in our lives that spoke to our destinies as young people. Many of these friends are still my friends and involved in ministry."

Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice is a membership

organization. Young people commit to maintaining their health, improving their minds, developing their relationships with God, and building up their community.

In its arts, education, and literacy programming, the center raises young people's consciousness. "We look at a muralist like Diego

Rivera who believed that his art had power to change society. Our young people have painted a mural depicting people well known for working for justice."

In her work Alexie challenges young people to

be spiritual leaders the way her friend Luis challenged her. "It's not enough for the young people who come to our center to go to a good college, escape from the neighborhood, and get a good job. God calls them to more, to build God's kingdom right here in this place. God teaches us that we have our gifts and therefore a purpose. We have the capacity to organize and create conditions in which we can live with dignity."

Young people who belong to the center study the Church's social justice teachings and act on them. They commit not to service or charity work but to building a just community. "Charity is sometimes cheap," Alexie explains, "in the sense that it can be easier to do than the work of justice. We teach young people to challenge themselves and discover their own power. We have programs in community organizing in which young people work to get our

neighborhood cleaned up and to decrease highway traffic to deal with the incredible rate of asthma we have in our community."

Today Alexie lives in her old neighborhood. "These people have taught me to see with different eyes. I see God's face in them," says Alexie. "I don't have all the money and things that I used to have, but the poor have saved me from living a life where at 80 I would have looked back and said what have I done? Now I can look at my life and say, 'If I died today, I lived the best way I could.'"

◆ What parts of Alexie's life are like your own? Which parts are different?

◆ How does Alexie's passion for justice grow?

◆ What groups address the wrongs that pain and anger you?

How Can I Serve?

In the gospels Jesus challenges us to love one another as he loves us, to follow his example, to do the works of mercy. These are his new commandments. Consider ways you can live any of the works of mercy.

◆ Feed the hungry.

◆ Give drink to the thirsty.



◆ Shelter the homeless.

◆ Clothe the naked.

◆ Visit the sick.

◆ Visit the imprisoned.

◆ Bury the dead.