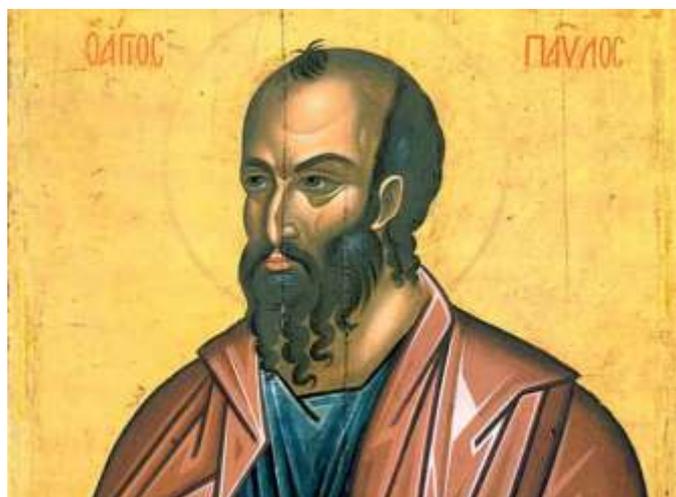


Parish Novena to the Holy Spirit
Day Five: Wednesday 27th May 2020



The Gift of Fortitude

The Holy Spirit's gift of Fortitude is the most easiest to explain. This is the gift that bestows upon us the courage and strength to witness to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Saint Paul wrote to the Philippians saying, ***'There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength.'*** (Phil 4:13)



As we know Saint Paul, the great missionary Apostle, faced danger on a daily basis. ***'...After he had spoken to the Hellenists...they were determined to kill him'*** (Acts 9:29).

'...[They] worked upon some devout women of the upper classes and the leading men of the city and persuaded them to turn against Paul and Barnabas...'
(Acts 13:50).

'Feeling was running high, and the tribune, afraid that they would tear Paul to pieces, ordered his troops to go down and haul him out...' (Acts 23:10).

Death, exile, torture and beatings were daily threats for Saint Paul and yet despite these dangers he still continued to witness to our Lord. Why? When he met the Risen Jesus on the Road to Damascus, Saint Paul went through a profound change and conversion. He had experienced Christ in a personal and intimate way that allowed him to see truth and reality. His faith was solid for he had actually encountered the Lord and wanted to share this wonderful moment with others. It was the Spirit's gift of Fortitude that allowed him to take his testimony and witness of Jesus and proclaim it to the world. Obstacles, dangers and frequent threats no longer held any fear for him because, as he wrote to the Philippians, ***'There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength.'*** (Phil 4:13) Faith is never a private and quiet affair and as Saint Paul shows us, if we are open and co-operate with the Spirit's gift of Fortitude, we too can overcome all fear and anxiety about others and the world.

A place that is part of my faith journey is the Royal English College of St. Alban in Valladolid, Spain. The Bishop sent me here as part of my initial formation for the priesthood.



In 1589 the college was founded for the training of men to become priests and return back to England that had outlawed the Faith. The college was home to many martyrs who had links to Lancashire and what is now the Diocese of Salford. Heroic priests like Saint Ambrose Barlow from Manchester, Saint John Plessington from Garstang and Blessed Thomas Whittaker from Burnley.



This is a picture of the college chapel on Martyrs Day. If you notice there is an alcove above the Tabernacle, on the back wall. In this alcove is a very ancient statue of Mary known as Our Lady Vulnerata. Daily and throughout the history of the college, seminarians, priests and martyrs have stood before this image of Our Blessed Mother and prayed. They have prayed for the help of Mary and the gift of Fortitude from the Holy Spirit. As Mary received the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation and conceived the Lord, so the prayer of the martyrs was also to receive the same Spirit as they returned to England and have the courage to face persecution and death.



Without the courage and conviction of those martyr priests and the perseverance of the people at home who held on to the faith, where would we be today? There were many good and holy lay people in England who continued to recite the outlawed prayers, and passed on the devotions and traditions that had sustained them for generations in their relationship with God. However, without the Eucharist there was no life and without Confession there was no growth. Priests were needed for the Sacraments and their ministry as much as dry earth needs water.

***'The poor and needy ask for water, and there is none,
their tongue is parched with thirst.
I, the Lord, will answer them,
I, the God of Israel, will not abandon them.
I will make rivers well up on the barren heights,
and fountains in the midsts of valleys;
turn the wilderness into a lake,
and dry ground into waterspring.'* (Is 41:17-18)**

The Spirit's gift of Fortitude working in both people and priests produces abundant fruit. What helped to fuel the martyr priests strength was that the land of England was ready to receive the Sacraments. The people of the earth of England were thirsting to encounter Jesus in the grace of those Sacraments and the ministry of the priesthood of Christ. What encouraged the recusant lay Catholics to persevere amidst trials and tribulations was that the Lord was sending shepherds because, as they knew, the Good Shepherd never abandons His flock, the sheep of his pasture.

Veni Creator Spiritus

***Come, Holy Spirit, Creator come,
From your bright heavenly throne!
Come, take possession of our souls,
And make them all your own.***

***You who are called the Paraclete,
Best gift of God above,
The living spring, the living fire,
Sweet unction, and true love!***

***You who are sevenfold in your grace,
Finger of God's right hand,
His promise, teaching little ones
To speak and understand!***

***O guide our minds with your blessed light,
With love our hearts inflame,
And with your strength which never decays
Confirm our mortal frame.***

***Far from us drive our hellish foe
True peace unto us bring,
And through all perils guide us safe
Beneath your sacred wing.***

*Through you may we the Father know,
Through you the eternal Son
And you the Spirit of them both
Thrice-blessed three in one.*

*All glory to the Father be,
And to the risen Son;
The same to you, O Paraclete,
While endless ages run.
Amen.*

In our time of meditation today, let's ask the Holy Spirit to help us embrace the strength and courage that he lavishes upon us. What am I scared of? Can I recognise and name those fears, anxieties and worries in my own life? Is faith for me a private secret locked away and only revealed to those who won't challenge me about it? Rather than a missionary and proclaimer of truth do I water down the Faith? Do I call it, criticise and denounce it, so as to be part of the crowd and go with the flow of public opinion? Is there a situation or an issue in my life that I need to have the courage to witness to? Have I the strength to change some of my own weaknesses and bad habits?

***There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One
who gives me strength.' (Phil 4:13)***

Come, Holy Spirit

Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love.

V. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

R. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray:

O God, who taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that by the gift of the same Spirit we may be always truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolation. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

God Bless and keep praying.

We continue on our Novena pilgrimage tomorrow.

St. Augustine of Canterbury, Apostle of England, Pray for us.

Fr. O'Brien