

Sun. after Ascension (HC-Gospel) (2020)

I was so excited this past week. In the raised garden out behind the parish house, I spied some tiny green tomatoes. They were smaller than the size of my thumb, but that's okay. They will grow!

To plant a garden is to be in a spirit of expectation.

Whether you are planting seed or setting plants, you are anticipating a harvest . . . ripe succulent tomatoes or whatever.

If expectation is the way of a gardener, so it is of a Christian . . . and before the Christian era the way of God's Covenant people Israel.

In the case of the latter, throughout much of the Old Testament, they were expecting a righteous king to appear out of David's line, one who would put all wrongs to rights, a Saviour.

Maintaining this spirit of expectation was not always easy, especially when God – at least from their point of view -- seemed to be dragging His feet.

At times God's ancient people could get pretty vocal. Words of Psalm 44 come to mind: **“Up, Lord, why sleepest, thou?”**

No doubt, you and I have felt the same way as we have look out at all that is wrong in our world. Where is God? Why doesn't He do something – now?

Be that as it may, as the New Testament opens, we find expectation giving way to fulfilment. And, as this happens, we find various outbursts of praise and thanksgiving. Case in point are words found in Mary's *Magnificat*:

“He [God] remembering his mercy hath hopen [helped] his servant Israel: as he promised to our forefathers Abraham and his seed for ever.”

Expectation, moreover, continued to be part and parcel of the experience of the people of God even after the promise of a Messiah was realized.

This spirit is especially evident in those days between our Lord's Ascension and Pentecost.

Remember what happened on the day of our Lord's Ascension. Just prior to be taken up, Jesus tells His little band of followers to go back to Jerusalem and wait for a great and wonderful gift – the Holy Spirit.

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls this One the **Comforter**.

Before I pass on, I should probably say something about this title.

Today, we associate comfort with ease. The word has a soft and fussy connotation.

But, not as it is used in connection with the Holy Spirit. Here, it has its older of meaning of strength.

Many of you will be familiar with the Bayeux Tapestry. It depicts the events leading up to the Norman conquest of England.

A few years ago, a van-load of us from St. Luke's went over to West Georgia College in Carrollton to see a very impressive copy of this work of art.

One thing we saw depicted on this tapestry was a bishop with staff in hand coming up behind a group of soldiers prodding them on. The caption underneath read:

“Bishop Hutto *comforts* the troops.”

Some comfort that is! But, that is exactly the type of ‘comfort’ the Holy Spirit gives us. He does bind up our wounds, but He also prods us on.

He enables us to stay strong and on task when opposition comes, and there will be opposition. Jesus tells us as much in today's Gospel when He says:

“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.”

Opposition from within and without continues to be the lot of God's people down to this very day.

Perhaps you have been seeing on television and on Facebook some recent examples, Christians being singled out and persecuted for gathering for worship in various places across the nation.

Perhaps the most egregious example came – I believe last Sunday – when the mayor of Chicago, a woman by the name of Lori Lightfoot, had cars parked on a certain street impounded and towed, believing them to belong to people worshipping at a local church.

As it turned out, that was not the case. They belonged to ordinary people who lived in this neighbourhood – health care workers, food store employees and the like.

The church people had parked their cars in a garage! Not one got taken away. Who can say that God does not have a sense of humour? Though I am sure the hapless souls whose cars were impounded did not find much humour in this tyrannical mayor's dastardly deed.

In times like this, we need the Holy Spirit to guide us in making wise and responsible decisions about our own safety and the safety of other . . . but also to know how to deal with oppression and opposition . . . to know when to take a stand and perhaps go to jail.

Well, you get the point. But back to this thought of God's people being in a spirit of expectation.

Without a doubt, the disciples were in just such a state as they headed back toward Jerusalem following our Lord's ascension.

Perhaps they felt as a little child feels when trying to go to sleep on Christmas eve. They could hardly contain themselves.

I want to suggest that this same spirit should permeate every fibre of our being. For you see, we have been given the same gift as the disciples were promised.

In our service of Confirmation, the Bishop prays for those he lays hands on, asking for them ghostly or spiritual strength. It's a present possession: God with us and God in us. We have it!

I wonder what propels *you* to get up out of the bed each morning?

Why not let it be: I have worth and value and a purpose. God has a job for me this day.

At that early hour, I may not know what that job is, but if I hold on to that thought it will be revealed.

Every morning you wake up expect great things from the Great Giver . . . new mountains to climb . . . new dragons to slay . . . new people to teach the peaceful songs of Zion.

Dare to be the witness God has commissioned you to be, and yes, a person of great expectation.

Let God open your eyes and expand your vision. Don't settle for the mediocre. Don't be a drifter and an idler. Rather dream big dreams and dare great things.

Our God is a God of surprises and serendipities. Look for them day by day in your life.

The best is yet to come! Heaven, yes, but almost certainly many happy moments along the way.