Sunday 27C

I'd like to invite you to go back to the day of your Confirmation. You might not remember the day clearly, so let me give you a hand. Before laying his hands on you head and anointing you with the blessed oil, the bishop (or maybe the priest) would have said this prayer.

All powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ… send your Holy Spirit upon your sons and daughters to be their helper and guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

At that moment, the gift of the Holy Spirit was renewed within you. The spiritual gift you had already received at Baptism was deepened. You were equipped with spiritual gifts. You were kitted out for mission as an ambassador for Christ in the Church and in the world.

Someone might say "Ok, Father, that may be true, but I don't remember feeling any different the next day, or the day after that. I may have received the Spirit and his gifts, but my life didn't change in any noticeable way."

And that's a fair point. In fact, that's kind of the point St Paul anticipates in the second reading today. What does he say to Timothy? "I am reminding you to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you." Paul is reminding Timothy of a special moment in his spiritual journey. Is he referring to Confirmation or Ordination? It doesn't really matter for our purposes. What matters is that when Paul laid hands on Timothy – and when the bishop laid his hands on us – we received a spiritual gift. A fire was lit in our heart. But like any fire, it needs to be fed or it will die out. It doesn't just grow spontaneously all by itself. It has to be fanned into a flame.

Fire, as we know, is fed by oxygen. The spiritual gift we have received is fed through prayer. When we pray – that is to say, when we enter into prayer, not just when we "say prayers" – something happens deep within us. The Spirit of God starts to move us, to stir within us. We become more aware of his presence and his power in our lives. We start to see the world, not just with our own eyes, but with the eyes of Christ. We start to think with the mind of Christ and to love with the heart of Christ.

As we fan this gift into a flame, we also become more aware of our mission in the Church. The Holy Spirit was not given to us just to sit there, doing nothing. Each one of us has a role in the Body of Christ. Each one of us has a share in the mission of the Church. Mine is not yours. Yours is not the same as the person sitting next to you. But they all matter. And they are all the work of the Spirit, who gives to each one as he pleases.

Of course, the temptation is to say "Yes, I'll come to Mass, I'll say my prayers, I'll happily put my hand in my pocket… but fanning things into a flame? Well that just sounds dangerous. I'll leave that to the saints and maybe the local eccentrics. But let's listen to what St Paul says to Timothy: "You did not receive a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power and love and self-control." The Holy Spirit would not have us sit on the gifts we have received. Having enriched us with spiritual gifts and equipped us for mission, he would not have us opt out from timidity. The Spirit wants us to opt in. Not half-heartedly, but with all our hearts. He

wants us to fan the gift we have already received, into a bright, burning flame. That's the way we will become witnesses to Christ in the world.