

Ablaze Witness Talk 11-5-17

“With us, Every Step of the Way”

Scott and Denise Hall

Slide 1: Opening Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Scott

Together we pray:

We stand before You, Holy Spirit, gathered in Your name.
Come to us, remain with us, and enlighten our hearts.

Give us light and strength to know Your will,
to make it our own, and to live it in our lives.
Guide us by Your wisdom, support us
by Your power, for You are God,
sharing the glory of Father and Son.
Unite us to Yourself in the bond of love,
and keep us faithful to all that is true.
You live and reign with
the Father and the Son, one God,
for ever and ever.

Amen

(Prayer from the Second Vatican Council)

Slide 2: The Fruit of the Spirit

Scott

When we speak of our lives or how our marriage has been guided
by the Holy Spirit we must first frame the discussion regarding
WHO and WHAT we are talking about.

First and foremost, when we speak of the Holy Spirit we are reminded that...

733 "God is Love" and love is his first gift, containing all others. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."¹²⁵ (218)

We are a temple of the Holy Spirit...

God is Love means that the 3rd person of the Blessed Trinity has our best interest at heart. Many times, this best interest is seen in God's economy and not ours. An example would be on observing our growth during a time of hardship or time of suffering.

When we speak of Grace, this concept is inseparably linked to the Holy Spirit. You can't have one without the other.

God's grace is the empowerment, that gift of love, the very life of the Trinity that desires for us, each of us, to bear much fruit.

That "grace" is best accessed when we have a desire and then follow through with cooperating with it.

And lastly, the Holy Spirit will never ever stop in His pursuit of drawing us evermore closely into His love story, into communion with Him, desiring for us to be those people that he envisions us to be, with our brokenness and woundedness healed, to be more fully human, to be like Christ.

Whether it is through prevenient grace with which He draws us into a relationship with Him, the sanctifying grace with which He enables us to live the Christian life, and the various 'actual' graces with which He intervenes or enables us to do His will, always remember that first and foremost, God is Love...

Slide 3:

Denise

- Scott and I were married in the United Methodist Church almost 36 years ago, when we lived in Florida; I had actually been a cradle Catholic but became disillusioned with our parish when I was in high school. I walked away and never intended to return.
- We spent our first 25 years of marriage bouncing from one evangelical church to another, but we were always missing 'something' in worship. We were both involved in music and drama, and were always trying to reinvent worship, to somehow make it more meaningful. But our stay at each church never lasted more than a few years.

Slide 4:

Denise

- During this time real life hit and we did what many couples do – we became really busy with family, jobs, church activities. Scott was working 6-7 days a week, 12 hours a day; I was working either full or part-time, taking care of the kids, and traveling to Florida often to take care of my aging parents. But neither one of us knew how to take care of our marriage.

Scott

- I had been discerning the idea of entering the ministry for many years and finally quit my job (went to Africa, went to WI and bought a piece of property, and then 9/11 happened) and attended full-time for two years. That was also a good opportunity to become reacquainted with our kids. I eventually decided against the ministry, but the seeds were planted from all the church fathers readings that I had done in seminary. That was when I first started to become interested in the Catholic Church.

Slide 5: Becoming Catholic (again)

Denise

- When my mom died in 2005, I attended Mass for the first time in 20 years with my aunt. This was the same church that I walked out on in high school, so I was shocked to find a whole new atmosphere in that same old church.
- And it wasn't long after that when Scott asked me to take him to Mass. You know, you can leave the Catholic Church, but it never leaves you. We sat in the back, right here at St. Monica's, and I was able to guide him through all the ups and downs. Scott's comment.
- Scott joined RCIA shortly after that, just to "find out more about the Catholic faith". Well, I knew I was toast. He was going to become Catholic, so I figured I had better start doing some reading or just get left behind. Scott joined the Church Easter, 2006; I joined a summer returning Catholics class and was received back in early fall.
- And then, everything should have been great, right?

Slide 6: Crash and Burn

Scott

- The following year, we came to the realization that our marriage was falling apart. We had become adept at pretending (and looking like) everything was fine. But inside things were going very badly. We figured out that we needed help and found a counselor, but needed more help.
- Looking back, we realize that we were missing two key elements of building a solid marriage: We had no idea what Christian marriage really is supposed to be – not just the

union of a man and woman who love each other and want to raise a family together, but the reflection of the love of the Holy Trinity to the whole world! And second, we did not have a good set of relational skills – didn't know how to handle conflict, didn't share our feelings appropriately, weren't able to talk about the really important things, and had no shared spirituality.

Slide 7: Retrouvaille

Denise

- The Holy Spirit had planted us firmly in the Catholic Church and that enabled us to find Retrouvaille, a Catholic peer ministry for at-risk couples. Retrouvaille became a game-changer for us, teaching us the marriage skills that we were sorely lacking, which allowed love to re-grow.
- The interesting thing is that the more we served other couples, **together**, the more our own marriage grew. Writing our story and writing to present were essential elements of growth.
- For a long time I didn't understand why God would bring us to the Catholic Church, and then allow our marriage to fall apart. The falling apart had a lot to do with personal choices and lack of good formation, but I came to understand that the Holy Spirit had actually brought us to the perfect place to go through this experience. The help from Retrouvaille of course, but the counsel from Fr. Jack, the grace given to us through the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist were immeasurable. The experience of finally learning to pray together as a couple; learning to forgive and be forgiven. Despite our struggles, we knew we were in the right place.

Slide 8: Father Jack

Scott

- Through our years of serving in Retrouvaille, we came to the conclusion that as couples, we need support at the parish level to grow in our marriages before they need Retrouvaille. We developed the desire to be a part of doing something about that need.
- So we began to pester Father Jack about starting up some kind of marriage enrichment opportunity. He kept sending us back to the drawing board and challenged us to learn about the sacrament of marriage.
- Denise had the opportunity at this point to take a year-long Theology of the Body course – which was a real eye-opener and great instruction on the nature and purpose of sacramental marriage – God’s plan.

Slide 9: Beloved and Marriage Ablaze

- And then, in the fullness of time, the Beloved program was published. **Aha moment of marriage as sacrament.**

Denise

- Growing together emotionally and spiritually
- Learning to pray together and depend on God’s grace, especially during Denise’s illness.
- Asking daily for God’s guidance, for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, drawing our children and grandchildren closer and closer to Christ.
- Serving together.
- Reading Scripture together.
- Reading good books (marriage, Catholicism, etc.) together
- God calls marriage a one flesh union; unity not uniformity; joined together in spirit, in purpose, in doing life.

God not only can bring good out of evil, He can bring a greater good. Our marriage is now greater than it ever was before. The Holy Spirit has been there, leading us and guiding us every step of the way, even when we had no clue of what we were doing. Maybe especially when we had no clue!

Scott

Quote from Greg Alexander in Beloved:

Slide 10: Closing Prayer - Prayer of Spouses to the Holy Spirit

O Holy Spirit,
Spirit of unity, love, and goodwill of Father and Son,
You make us one in the sacred union of marriage.
Grant that, like the first Christians, we may be one heart and one mind.
Make us respect one another,
help one another in our striving for holiness,
and support one another.
Be our Guide,
our Counselor,
and our Consoler.
Make us bear one another's burdens during
our journey to heaven,
where we hope to live forever
as adopted children of the Triune God.
Amen.

Questions:

1. Do you tend to think of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force or as a real person of the Holy Trinity? What difference does that perception make to your relationship with Him?
2. Looking back on the past several years of your life (the good times, the tough times, the times of suffering), in what ways do you see that the Holy Spirit was working?