Today Pentecost is considered the birthday of the Church.

We could certainly talk about the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit-

Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Counsel, Fortitude, Piety

But I think I might fall asleep before any of you do...

So today on the Holy Spirit’s holiday and in this season of graduation, of moving on to new chapters in our lives,

let’s instead focus on some other gifts- Fire and Diversity and Communication.

In the reading from Acts we see a formerly confident but now somewhat insecure group of disciples that are huddled together in an upper room; confused, rundown, needing to be recharged with power from above. In many ways is that not the Church today?

Internal and Secular forces increasingly try to marginalize us.

Today it’s very fashionable to be anti-Church.

How do we handle humiliating Church scandals, declining church attendance, the decreased numbers and older population of our seminaries and convents, divisive words from some leaders, even the growing agnosticism of our world?

Jesus has sent us back into the upper room, to pray and to wait, to sort out our confusion, to re-root ourselves in the basics in order to prepare to receive a new fire.

Much of what used to work for us no longer does. We find it harder than ever to pass on our faith to our own children

to fire the religious imagination of our culture

to make a religious and moral dent of any kind in society.

So, on a day that I’ve said is the birthday of the Church, is our Church really all that much a cause for celebration? Has our faith been worth receiving and is it worth giving?

It’s no secret that many of us wonder why so many of our youth seem not to take our church as seriously as we think we once did. We can say that the homilies are boring or the music is old and stale.

Maybe its a lack of reverence, the request for money, or church language that may seem exclusive of others.  
  
But wherever we point the finger, whatever it is, we lack the fire.

If today Doug Pederson came up to you and said the Eagles needed a spark this season, can you help out in some way, would you join him? Probably most of us would jump at the chance. Well, the Church needs a spark and Jesus is calling.

There are many gifts in the Church, many ministries, many works, many members. The Holy Spirit’s purpose is always to bring us together, to put aside our differences, to let us hear the other person, to think about not just ourselves. Each of us has a “language” all our own that expresses who we are. We just need to recognize and listen to each other’s language.

There are many examples of these gifts in the Church – both old and new:

In our own age, we have seen the wonderful gift of enlightened leadership embodied in two recent popes: John XXIII and John Paul II. And now with Pope Francis.

We have seen the gift of contemplation and spirituality embodied in Thomas Merton and St Ignatius Loyola. Some of us would love to have that special charism of solitary prayer. But if we just can’t do it, are we inferior? Maybe we think that spiritual prayer is a waste of time and we need to be more active.

For a commitment to the poor just look to Sr. Mary Scullion, co-founder of Project HOME in Philadelphia, or Mother Teresa. Certainly those who have devoted their lives to the corporal works of mercy win the respect of us all. Do we not secretly desire to be like them but maybe we complain that we just don’t have the time?  
  
We have seen the gifts of social justice embodied in Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker, and in St Katherine Drexel from Philadelphia. Many of us admire Christian social activists—people who hunger, thirst, and labor for justice. However at times we don’t like the guilt trip- we wish they just wouldn’t bother us. Or probably more commonly we don’t want the reminder that the gospels challenge our way of life.

Are there gifts of conservatives that liberals miss? Isn’t there a ministry the liberal gives us that the conservative does not? Don’t traditionalists as well as innovators have a charism? Don’t they all embody our faith in ways both necessary and complementary?

St. Paul would say yes. The variety of talents and works serves the common good. Your race, financial background, sexuality, geographic origin just doesn’t matter. The diversity of the members makes us one body.

What matters is not the nature of the gift but that through the gift the Spirit is working in us to renew the face of the earth.

Too often we forget that what God ultimately wants of us is:

charity, patience, understanding, humility, prayer, community with each other, forgiveness, and a non-judgmental attitude.

Pope Francis says that if we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit, richness, variety and diversity never become a source of conflict, because the Spirit impels us to experience variety within the communion of the Church.

We should communicate to the world, and to our young, in a language that we all understand. It is the language of the Holy Spirit, the language of love, revealed in patience and kindness, generosity and trust, in a faith that is both forgiving and enduring.

This weekend with friends I celebrated 35 yrs having graduated from Villanova.

I’m reminded of what an Augustinian priest from Villanova would say during Mass. After the Lamb of God, he would hold up the host and say:

See what you are, Receive what you see, and Strive beyond all else to become what you receive.

We are all the Body of Christ, the Church.

Go and set the world aflame.