

## 6th Sunday of Easter

I was never very good at sports when I was a child, but most of my brothers and sisters were. They excelled at football, baseball and volleyball. Our parents enjoyed good health, and it was one of the benefits we inherited from them naturally.

Today's first reading tells about a follower of Christ who seems to have inherited gifts naturally. Philip was one of the "seven reputable men filled with the Spirit and wisdom," mentioned in last week's first reading. They were mainly chosen to preserve order when sharing food among different language groups. However, Philip did more. He preached the gospel. Because of persecution, he traveled to places he may not otherwise have gone - like Samaria.

You know from several stories in the gospels that Jews and Samaritans lived in tension. For example, in Luke's gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, and after he healed ten lepers, the one who returned to thank him was, surprisingly, another Samaritan. Luke also wrote Acts of the Apostles, so he probably meant to surprise his readers with today's story of Philip going to Samaria. Philip accompanied his message with signs and wonders, just as Jesus had done: healing the sick and expelling demons. People listened. Philip first accepted a fairly small task in the community, but he did more. He seems to have inherited these abilities naturally - whether from his parents or from the apostles and other believers. He used his gifts for the sake of the gospel.

Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, the apostles learned that some Samaritans were believing in Christ. So Peter and John traveled there. They discovered that Philip had baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, but the new Christians had not yet received the Holy Spirit. So, Peter and John "laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." In this way the apostles confirmed the work that Philip had been doing.

The Catholic Church cites this passage as a biblical foundation for the sacrament of confirmation. As the apostles Peter and John laid hands on people who had already been baptized by someone else, in order to give the Holy Spirit, so bishops, the successors of the apostles, lay hands on people previously baptized in order to give them the Holy Spirit. The church makes an exception on days like the Easter Vigil, when a priest who baptizes an adult or a child of catechetical age also confirms that person.

It's estimated that about 90% of Catholics have made their first communion, and about 84% have been confirmed. The gifts of the Holy Spirit that we received in our confirmation are like gifts we inherit supernaturally. They support us throughout our lives. There may be days when you discover that you have some abilities you didn't realize you had - listening, caring, advising, judging, and learning, for example. We received a strengthening of those gifts when we were confirmed. Bishop Johnston will confirm adult Catholics at the cathedral downtown in just a few weeks. If you have been confirmed, rejoice in your gifts. If you have not been confirmed, please let us know.

**SUNDAY, MAY 21, 2017**