

A guy I know was very particular about the women he dated. He came from a large Catholic family and he wanted a large Catholic family. He grew up in the city, but he dreamed of life on a farm. So whenever he started up with a new girl friend, he said, "I have three questions for you: Are you a Catholic? How many kids do you want to have? And what do you think of pigs?" He is happily married now to a Catholic. They have children. And they have pigs.

Catholics get kind of clubby. Some of us look down on other Christians. Many Catholic parents hope their children will marry other Catholics, or at least someone who will become a Catholic. We wish others would share the faith we love. But at times we belittle someone else's faith.

Today's first reading tells how the disciples dealt with someone else's faith. Cornelius was a Gentile who wanted to learn more about Christ. He sent two servants to bring Peter to his house. Peter, meanwhile, had a vision that God was calling Jews and Gentiles to follow Christ. At that moment the servants of Cornelius knocked on the door, so Peter accompanied them home, where today's reading takes place. Peter went in, and Cornelius knelt down as if the apostle were a god. Peter started to teach the entire household about Christ, when an amazing thing happened. The Holy Spirit came upon the members of the house, just as at Pentecost. These Gentiles began speaking in tongues and glorifying God. To Peter this made no sense. He had just come to realize that Gentiles might become Christians. But the sequence was: first you teach, then you baptize, then you see the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here, while Peter was teaching, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius *before he was baptized*. God had already decided the case before Peter finished teaching. Peter did the only thing he could: He baptized them all. Jew and Gentile were becoming one in Christ.

God sometimes sends the Spirit where we do not expect it. Someone with a different belief, race, politics or generation moves into town, your neighborhood, your family or your church. Someone we thought was an opponent may on occasion have a better grasp of God than we do.

Catholics want to share our faith. But God sometimes appears where we do not expect and works wonders that don't seem right. The Holy Spirit may become present in surprising places.