

**Spirit of Hope**  
Homily of May 1, 2005  
by Father Brian Timoney

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Some of you may recall an incident that I have related more than once. It happened about thirty years ago. I was in Tahoe and I was speaking to the manager of one of the casinos there. In the course of the conversation he said, “You know, Father, I think that you and I are in the same business.” Well, puzzled, I asked him what on earth he meant. He said, “We are both selling hope.” Well, I studied many years in the seminary. I, since then, have read many theological books and spiritual writers and here, twenty years after my ordination I had to go to Tahoe to hear an explanation of my priesthood from a casino manager. I think that what he said about me is true. I think that’s my business as a priest, to sell hope. But I think it is not true about him. He is not selling hope. He is selling daydreams, wishful thinking. We might all daydream about winning the big jackpot, but that is rather divorced from reality.

Hope, on the other hand, is grounded in reality. As a Jewish writer, Martin Buber, said once “Hope imagines the real.... Hope imagines the real.” What reality does our hope imagine? The goodness, the kindness, the providence of our God, that is our reality and that is what our hope is based on. We do not daydream as Christians. We do not indulge in wishful thinking, because our hope is based on the word of God. And that is very, very real. However, the hope that rises in our hearts can be very fragile, very tentative; for example, our hope for peace between Israel and Palestine, our hope for a stable Iraq, free from bombing, our hope for an end to violence in our cities, our hope for overcoming our own weaknesses and our own addictions.

Hope needs help. And that is why Jesus promised to send the Spirit. He realized how his followers would feel after his ascension to Heaven. He knew that they would feel helpless, and hide in that upper room with the doors locked, without much hope in their hearts. And so, as we find in some of the old time movies, the cavalry to the rescue, in the guise of the Holy Spirit! With the help of the Spirit, God’s Spirit, the disciples will be able to face the future, not from daydreaming, not from wishful thinking, but solidly grounded in God’s word, the promise of Jesus to be with them always.

Jesus calls the Spirit an advocate. We would use the term, “an attorney,” someone that you go to in trouble, someone you trust with your story, someone who would give you good advice, someone who believes in you and will stand by you in court and argue your case and give you solid hope for a good outcome. The Holy Spirit, Jesus says, is our advocate, our attorney, who will always stand by us. The Holy Spirit is God, God in the role of enlightener and consoler, guide and comforter, the Spirit of life, the life-giving, hope-giving aspect of God. And the Spirit is there for us specifically in two circumstances of life, when we have to make big decisions and when we are depressed.

Making decisions: It is not too often in life that we are faced with a really, really big decision. But when we are, we should invoke the Holy Spirit and, on our part, be truly open in mind and heart to the inspiration of the Spirit and the guidance of the Spirit in making those decisions. When we feel depressed, depressed about our own failures or conflict in the home, when we worry about our loved ones and the seemingly destructive course that they may be taking, we need the Spirit to be there for us, to see us through, to bring us peace of mind, and the Spirit will be there. In the Spirit we will find hope.

St. Peter told his converts that they should be always ready to give an explanation for their hope, for their reason for being so joyful in the Lord. We too should be ready to give an explanation for our hope and our joy in the Lord. And what do we say other than that it is based on reality because it is based on the promise of Jesus Christ. “I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to be with you always.” Jesus has always been truthful. Jesus has always been faithful to his promises. Why should we doubt him now? Amen.