

Baccalaureate Mass

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This morning you may be feeling like the disciples of Jesus in the gospel – a bit fearful about what happens when you leave the Hilltop. Your ambivalence reflects an abiding human inclination to stay put rather than move on, to stick with the known rather than embrace the unknown, to stay on the marked path rather than follow a side trail.

Jesus comes into the room and stands with his frightened followers, counsels them to be at peace and then sends them out to continue God's work, which Jesus himself had only just begun. The outcasts that Jesus befriended, the suffering that he healed, the abuses that he denounced, the broken hearts that he mended and the hungry whom he fed – are among us still. They still call to us as they called out to Jesus, and Jesus' concern – God's concern for suffering humanity – has not abated over the centuries.

Jesus sends his followers out to do God's work. But he gives them more than pep talk and pat on the back. In imagery reminiscent of Genesis where God formed humanity from the soil of the earth, breathed the breath of life into that figure and humanity came alive, so, too, Jesus breathes on his followers and they have the opportunity to come alive in God's own Spirit. Instead of fear, they know the power of God in their own lives.

We are uniquely positioned after September 11 to know the power of God's Spirit in the human heart. We know the story of Fr. Michael Judge who ministered to a dying fire fighter and was killed by toppling rubble in the unstable minutes before the World Trade Center collapsed. We know about the fellow from Florida who spent his entire vacation helping at ground zero. We know about the heroic fire captain who ordered his men back and then himself rushed into a burning office to save lives and lost his own. We know about rescue workers who worked non stop for hours trying find victims who could be rescued.