

Homily for the Solemnity of the Ascension 2014  
St. Joseph's Church                      May 31-June 1, 2014  
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Central Idea: Jesus promises us power, but not the type that gives us control over others, but one that frees us to love one another.

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you,  
and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth."*

Do you know what a stinger is?

If you have seen any of the "superhero" type movies, you may have seen a stinger. It is a scene that they tack on at the very end, after all of the credits, sometimes to set up the next film. The granddaddy of all stingers is actually from the film Ferris Bueller's Day Off, lovingly recreated by some of my students for the Washington parade last weekend. In it, Ferris knowingly looks right into the camera, breaking the fourth wall, and tells the audience to go home, there is no more movie. It is actually pretty funny.

The first IronMan movie stinger has the hero coming home to find Samuel L. Jackson as Nick Fury, the leader of SHIELD. That, of course, set up the movie The Avengers. Of late, however, stingers have become a bit more irritating. I really liked the latest X-Men movie and was wondering if there was a stinger at the end (there was). I didn't stay, the credits were interminable, but I later found out that the stinger set up the next film, due out in two years. Don't worry you have to be a super nerd to understand what it means. It seems as though stingers have moved from being fun and amusing, to being exasperating and annoying. What happens is that the audience is unable to find any real completion or closure. In a sense, as one wag put it, the movie is just watching a two hour trailer for the next film.

Long before Ferris Bueller, Iron Man and the X-Men, Jesus offers his disciples, his Church, a stinger of sorts. He has taught them, shown them his power in miracles, given them the gift of the Eucharist, and startled them by remaining silent as he is arrested, tried and executed. He rose from the dead and now he is ascending to the Father. And as he leaves, as a last farewell, he offers them a parting word, a last farewell, a stinger, if you will. He declares to his disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

At first glance, this seems like a good thing, no better than that, a tremendous and glorious thing. Power! Power to the people, right on! Who does not want to be empowered? Most of the struggle of human history has been a struggle for power. Wars, social movements, economic development, all focus on the acquisition, the attainment, the possession and ultimately the wielding of power. Somehow we have convinced

ourselves that the getting of power, whether it be politically, economically, socially is the be all and end all of life. Power!

But looks can be deceiving. With great power comes great responsibility, or so I learned watching the Spiderman movies. When we are empowered, we are also burdened. When we are empowered, people expect results. When we are empowered people expect more, they expect better. In fact, when we are empowered, people expect greatness.

Living the Christian life is tough. Theoretically, we are called to a higher standard, a much higher standard. That is why when a Christian falls short, especially when one is a leader, it is so scandalous, so shocking, so appalling. Recently, the director of the latest X-Men movies was accused of sexual abuse of a minor. Hollywood shrugged it off. If it were a priest, there would already be three documentaries out on it. (In the interest of fairness, someone is making *a* documentary about it.) You might find it astonishing that I don't mind this double standard, I even welcome it. I should be, we should be, held to a higher standard. Why? Because we are heirs to Jesus' stinger: you will be given power when the Holy Spirit comes.

Furthermore, as if that wasn't enough, the power that Jesus comes to give us is unlike any power that the world has to offer. Jesus' gift of power is the power to serve, the power to give generously, the power to empower others, the power to love. As you may have heard through the grapevine, I will be getting a new job at Borgia next month. As I like to joke about it, I am going to the "dark side." Though I will still be teaching one class, next year I will be learning how to become an administrator. The title is vice-president. Apparently, I will be given power...eventually. But I don't see this move as a control thing. Rather, I see my role as one who serves, as one who allows the faculty and staff to do their roles to the best of their ability. Power? If this is moving up, it still feels very heavy. If this is all about me being in command, being in charge, ruling, I think I missed the point.

And so it is for all of us. Jesus came to bring us power, but that power must be managed correctly, honestly, with integrity and honor. It calls us to greatness and distinction, it calls us far beyond the prevailing standards. It is simply the most awesome thing in the world, but it is a great and ponderous burden as well. It is both Power! and Power?

That is the final word, the last teaching, the stinger Jesus leaves us.

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you...*

*Congratulations!*

Consider yourself stung.

