

Good Morning, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Sophia Marlino and I am a graduating senior at Notre Dame Academy. Next year I will be attending Middlebury College in Vermont - Don't worry. I knew as soon as you heard the word *senior*, your mind immediately went to college, so I thought I'd get that out of the way as soon as possible!

These past few weeks have been extremely hectic as the school year comes to a close especially with AP exams. Last Sunday, I was holed up in the Tredyffrin Library for 3 hours working on AP Physics. I had to leave around 4:00 to get to my friend's graduation party and was running late. While I was walking out of the library bleary eyed, and my brain full of physics equations, a man walked up to me and introduced himself. His name was Brian and he was an attorney who grew up in the area and went to Malvern Prep. After we got past the basic small talk he handed me a pamphlet labeled "What is Heaven?" and asked me "Sophia, If you died right now, do you believe you would go to Heaven?" After three hours of physics my brain could barely handle the small talk let alone this loaded question and I had no idea what to tell him! So I responded "I haven't given it much thought." Brian took this opportunity to give me some information to help me answer this question. He explained to me that, in the Bible, God is portrayed as an absolutely perfect being, and as humans and as sinners none of us are really *worthy* of being in His presence and therefore not worthy of the promises of Heaven.

I was wondering what I had got myself into by allowing Brian to talk to me at all, and I was trying to strategize my escape. But Brian continued with another question, a personal one: "Are you a sinner?" After hearing it many times between Catholic School religion class and here at church, I was quick to respond "Of course I am!" He was delighted by this answer, as it was one less thing he had to explain to me. He continued on, telling me that as sinners our only way to be with God is through Jesus and by accepting Jesus into our hearts; he even asked me if I wanted to accept Jesus into my heart right there!

I was confused by the suggestion, but I wanted to be polite. So I answered "Maybe," and Brian took this as a definitive yes. He called over one of his friends and told him that I was "ready to invite Jesus into my heart." I responded "Wait a second--what exactly does that entail?" Brian's answer was unsettling, so I told him I needed more time to think about it. He let me go with a prayer and his business card, so I could contact him whenever I was ready to "accept Jesus into my heart." But to be honest, he also left me with some things to think about.

At youth group that night, Sarah was talking about God and how much He loves all of us and how He is so busy loving us that our sins are almost irrelevant to Him. When I heard this, I thought of what Brian had told me earlier, how God was too perfect for us and how we needed Jesus's help to get to him. The difference between these perspectives gave me even more to think about: How exactly can we get to God and

reach Heaven? Will God love us for who we are no matter what we do? Or will He only accept us if we “accept Jesus into our hearts”?

I think it might be a mix of the two. We heard in the first reading today, from Acts, of the Holy Spirit coming down in “tongues as of fire.” As the Holy Spirit filled each person, they each gained the ability to freely communicate despite their diverse backgrounds.

When I first read the passage, I imagined literal fire coming from above and touching each person, but if you take a closer look, the gospel reads “tongues as of fire,” not just “tongues of fire.” Therefore, these tongues are not literal flames but rather are referring to the ability the disciples gain to be able to communicate freely and beautifully despite all of them coming from different places and speaking different languages. This language of the Holy Spirit is something so intense and so powerful that it could only be described as something as passionate as fire. Suddenly, as the Holy Spirit comes among the apostles, they are equal and united as one people under God. That equality and unification is what God is looking for when He decides whether or not we are worthy of passage to Heaven. Now the question is, how do we achieve that unity?

The Holy Spirit works through me in ways I could have never even imagined. It can be something as simple as running into Brian last weekend and getting a topic for

my sermon today or as large as the impact St. David's has had on my life. In 8th grade, my Mom signed me up for the G5 mission trip to Guatemala. It was there where I first got a grip on my faith and finally began to understand my relationship with God. After that it was the Alaska trip, Uganda and Washington DC where I got to meet new people and see amazing places. On those mission trips everyone kept a journal and the staple end of the day exercise were three simple questions we had to answer

1. What did you learn about yourself today?
2. What did you learn about others?
- And 3. Where did you see God today?

The third question was always my favorite because it forced me to recognize God as the source of all the incredible places I saw, people I met and experiences I had on those trips. It forced me to see the Holy Spirit in my surroundings. It was so easy to answer that question after hiking a volcano, playing soccer with little kids outside a medical clinic all day or seeing a moose for the first time. When I got home from those trips I would always miss the group I was with and the places I just visited and forgot to see the Holy Spirit in my surroundings at home.

I did not realize how easy it was to answer that question at home too. Looking at it now, I see the Holy Spirit acting through the people around me everyday. I see It acting through my mom who sacrifices so much of her time and sleep to help other

women and also in everything she does for our family. I see it in my dad with everything he does for me, somehow managing to get me out of bed every morning for school. I see the Holy Spirit in my friend Hayden who spends so much time here at St. David's helping out that he has gained the nickname of "Church Rat." I see the Holy Spirit in the community here at St. David's.

The thing is, these people around me who are living their everyday lives, may not even recognize the Holy Spirit acting through them. Their actions reflect the unity and the equality reaped on Pentecost when the apostles were all speaking the language of the Holy Spirit. There is no fire resting over their heads as they do these things. They are not explicitly accepting Jesus into their hearts on the Tredyffrin Library steps but rather doing things that create equality and unity in our community. The Holy Spirit is quietly working through them in the same way It did in Acts.

Now, my question for you is a variation of that third question we answer everyday on our mission trips, where do you see the Holy Spirit? How do you see It acting through you and the people around you? I challenge you to take time everyday to look for It and recognize the impact it has on your community, your family and your friends.

The Holy Spirit is in all of us, we just need to look for It.