

Edwina Gateley, the founder of the Volunteer Missionary

Movement told this story to a group of her workers:

“Once upon a time we captured God and we put God into a box and we put a beautiful velvet curtain around the box. We placed candles and flowers around the box and then we said to the poor and the dispossessed, ‘Come! Come and see what we have! Come and see God!’ and they came and knelt before God.

One day, very long ago, The Spirit in the box turned the key from the inside and pushed it open. The Spirit looked around the church and saw that nobody was there! They had all gone. Not a soul was in the place. The Spirit then said, ‘I’m getting out of here.’ The Spirit shot out of the box. The Spirit escaped and has been sighted a few times since then. She was last seen with a bag lady in a McDonald’s”

Our readings from scripture today capture a similar truth about the presence of God in our life. The Spirit is God’s gift and it cannot be claimed as a possession of any one person or group. The Spirit of God cannot be contained, it will blow where it will and that is why we can discover the presence of the Spirit in the least likely people and in the

most unexpected places.

In our first reading the growing community of believers thought the Spirit of God could be captured and put into the confines of Judaism with its rich faith heritage and century old traditions. But the Spirit had other plans. The very essence of the Spirit is to be fluid and surprising. The Spirit guided the community to see that decisions about membership, missionary activity and so forth were no longer solely theirs to make. The earliest leaders of the community learned that their continued surrender to the workings of the Spirit would be their source of strength and survival.

That same Spirit continues to work within our church moving us in directions that are new and unpredictable. That is why it is crucial for us to put our trust in God especially in times of great trial and change. It is easy to

become anxious and fearful when the familiar falls by the wayside and we encounter the unfamiliar.

Remember back in 2010 when it was announced that the Pope had confirmed the new translation of the Roman Missal. After nine years of extensive work on the part of Vatican officials, English speaking bishops from around the world, and hundreds of consultants, some of the texts that we had used at mass were changed so that they would reflect a more accurate translation of the Latin text; We were told that it would offer us an opportunity to see the beauty that was present in the prayers.

Some Catholics were angry, most were hesitant, and skeptical. Here we are 6 years later and no one even bats an eye at the newly worded prayers.

In times of change and uncertainty, we need to remind ourselves of the promises made by Jesus in our gospel from St. John, “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you....Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”