

This past year-and-a-quarter has been awful in many ways. But one of the few bright spots was getting to binge-watch the Netflix series, *Cobra Kai*.

Cobra Kai revisits the world of the successful 1984 movie, *The Karate Kid*, and its sequels. The series brings the storyline and the characters forward three-and-a-half decades into our time. The original protagonists and villains who were portrayed as teenagers in the original movies are now grappling with issues of life as middle-aged adults. And they in turn are trying to help shape a new generation of teenagers whom they are parenting and/or mentoring.

And remarkably, these old characters from the 80's movies are being played by the same actors who are also now middle-aged. This does not just apply to the leads—they also bring back a huge number of minor characters. One of the joys is getting to see them all again—it's much like going to a high school reunion after 35 years.

However, what I appreciate most about *Cobra Kai* is the character development. In the original movies, things were more black-and-white, there were heroes and there were villains.

But in *Cobra Kai*, we get see the some of the heroic characters struggling with the darker aspects of their own personalities. And we see growth and goodness coming from some of the villains from the original movies.

And we see the lead protagonist, Daniel LaRusso, and the lead antagonist, Johnny Lawrence, struggling with their continuing relationship. Fate keeps putting them in each other's paths. Their rivalry is still sharp at times. At other times, they are able to work past some of their past differences. At times, they almost even become friends. But then other events transpire, and the old patterns reassert themselves. It makes for good drama.

But there is a big spiritual hole in the show *Cobra Kai*. And that is the absence of Daniel's teacher and mentor from the original movies, Mr. Miyagi. (In the movies, Mr. Miyagi was played by the late actor Pat Morita, a role which garnered him a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor.) Mr. Miyagi was the spiritual heart and core of *The Karate Kid* movies.

But now, in *Cobra Kai*, Mr. Miyagi is gone. And Daniel is trying to move forward with life and to teach a new generation the lessons he himself had learned from Mr. Miyagi. Daniel is trying to channel the spirit of Mr. Miyagi as he, Daniel, tries to help and care for others. And yet, he is acutely aware of Mr. Miyagi's absence.

In life, we eventually lose those important to us, and we have to find ways to carry on and move forward.

In the past decade, I have lost a significant number of important mentors: seminary professors, priests, and bishops who were important to me. I have to move forward remembering them and remembering what they taught. With some of them, I can revisit their writings. But they themselves are no longer here to consult with or learn from. I have to move forward based on past learning from them and memories of them.

But today, on Pentecost, we celebrate something different, something more. We celebrate something that sets the Christian church apart. It sets Jesus' disciples apart. It's a big part of what this day of Pentecost that we celebrate every year is all about.

On that very first day of Pentecost, Jesus' disciples probably thought they were in a similar situation to Daniel LaRusso.

Their master had been taken from them. In fact, they had lost him twice. Jesus had been Crucified on Good Friday. Then he rose and returned to them on Easter. But as we celebrated last week, 40 days after Easter Jesus ascended into heaven.

Sure, Jesus made the disciples lots of promises. He promises them that he will send the Spirit. He promises that God will empower the them and turn them from disciples into apostles.

Disciple—one who sits under a teacher's tutelage or discipline. Discipline, disciple. Same root word.

But an apostle is different than a disciple.

Apostle—one who is sent forth with a message. Apostle, postal. Same root word. One who carries a message.

So on that first day of Pentecost, the disciples might think they're living with a void. They might think that they been left alone to carry out their work, to carry Jesus' message out into the world as best they can.

Yes, they have wonderful memories of their time with Jesus that they can hang onto.

Yes, I'm sure they talked about and remembered his teachings and the things he did when he was present amongst them.

But I'm sure also sure they were missing Jesus' presence with them. I believe they were acutely perceiving a void, and absence, a hole in their lives where Jesus used to be.

But Jesus had made them a big promise, both before and after his resurrection.

Jesus said several times basically, 'Yes, I'm going away. But you won't be abandoned. You won't be alone. Instead, the Holy Spirit is going to come. The Holy Spirit will be a continuing presence, God's continuing presence in your midst.'

Jesus has promised that through the Holy Spirit, God will continue to teach and instruct the disciples as they did the work of apostles.

We heard one of these instances of Jesus' promise as a part of this in our Gospel lesson.

Jesus says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."¹

Jesus is basically saying, 'I've taught you a lot, but I haven't been able to teach you everything. You can't yet grasp everything.' In essence, "You can't handle the truth," at least not in its totality.

In *The Karate Kid*, Daniel LaRusso was not able at age 17 or 18 to fully understand the depths of what he was being taught by Mr. Miyagi. He wouldn't really get it until 35 years later.

In the same way, Jesus is telling his disciples that they're not ready to understand everything yet. But, Jesus tells his disciples, the Holy Spirit will come. And the Holy Spirit will continue to be there. And the Holy Spirit will teach and guide these apostles and help them to move forward.

Unlike Daniel LaRusso, the disciples will have a continuing presence to guide them. They will be equipped to move forward. They won't just have to rely on hazy old memories of some dead teacher.

Yes, God was present in a very special way in the person of Jesus Christ. But the good news of Pentecost is, God will continue to be present in a very special way through the person and continuing presence of the Holy Spirit.

In a real and palpable way, their teacher and his teachings and his continuing teaching will always be with them.

In a real and palpable way, *our* teacher and his teachings and his continuing teaching will always be with us.

When the Holy Spirit comes, Jesus says, he will guide you.
May we all be open to the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*"O God, who on this day taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen."*²

¹ Jn 16:12-13

² BCP p 237