

Pentecost Sunday June 04, 2017

Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13 or Romans 8:8-17; John 20:19-23

Today, we are celebrating Pentecost Sunday, the day when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples and the church was founded. The spirit came upon the timid disciples in the form of tongues of fire and transformed them into true messengers of Jesus. Once they received the Spirit, they went out boldly and preached to all in Jerusalem and elsewhere. On this day Jesus wants us to know the freedom of living in his Spirit. This feast is the culmination of the Paschal mystery where Jesus fulfills his promise of sending the Spirit of the Father and the Son on his disciples. This feast also indicates that the Holy Spirit is an on-going reality, who will be with the church forever and who will touch our lives every single day. We celebrate this day to recognize the gift of the Holy Spirit, realizing that God's very life, breath and energy lives in all believers. The celebration tells us that the same Spirit is given to each one of us, that we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body and that the Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead will raise us too. All the three readings make reference to the arrival of the Holy Spirit, being baptized in the Spirit and being sent forth to proclaim the Word of God so others may convert to the living faith. The first reading gives a graphic picture of Pentecost with the Spirit descending on the disciples in the form of tongues of fire and leads them to speak in many languages as they speak about Jesus. All are amazed at their teaching. The Gospel tells us of the happenings immediately after the Resurrection. Jesus suddenly appears to the disciples, gives them peace and gives them the Holy Spirit. With this they get the power to forgive sins of people and reconcile them. In the second reading Paul says that there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit and through the spirit we have become one body in Christ.

After his Resurrection Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Father's gift of the Holy Spirit, from whom they would receive power to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. Jesus had promised the disciples that he would be going away and he will not leave them orphans. He will send to them an Advocate who will make them know of the Father and of Jesus. He will also open them to the errors of the world so they follow the right path. After his ascension to heaven, the men returned to Jerusalem and joined together in prayer in an upper room. On the Day of Pentecost, just as Jesus had promised they received the Spirit. It

came in the form of a violent wind that filled the house and the tongues of fire came to rest on each of them. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, they were given the power of preaching and healing and they spoke in tongues. Thus having received the Holy Spirit, the disciples went out and preached the message of Jesus. This was the beginning of the Church.

Pentecost means fiftieth day. It was the second of three great Jewish Feasts. For the Jews it was a day of gratitude. It was a day of thanksgiving for the completion of the harvest. However, on this day fiftieth day after the resurrection a great transformation took place in the small group of disciples. They were persons perplexed, scared, dumbfounded and disappointed, that kept them closeted in a little upper room. Rightly, we are not told where that room was situated. We only know that room was in a house in Jerusalem and people had come to Jerusalem from every nation to express their harvest gratitude. They spoke different languages; they came with different intentions; they had different motives. It is this motley group who witnessed a sound that made them assemble together. To their astonishment, some Galilean spoke to them in their own native language. To their surprise, some unheard of illiterates spoke the language they understood so well. We all know how difficult it is to learn another language. Yet we are told that these disciples spoke and people, coming from various nations, understood them. It is the hearers and not the speakers who make this claim! This was the novel experience of the new harvest, Pentecost! Indeed as St Paul tells us that no one can say, "Jesus is Lord" unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Today's First Reading from The Acts of the Apostles tells us that the promise of Jesus been fulfilled. While staying with them, He had ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. In obedience to Jesus, the disciples gathered together in Jerusalem and experienced the divine sign. The disciples did receive the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day. Luke initiates the new creation and the introduction of the age of the Holy Spirit as the dominant reality of humankind. The arrival of the Holy Spirit came with a sound like the rush of a violent wind. So powerful was the sound that it was also heard by devout Jews from every nation under heaven who were living in Jerusalem. It is interesting to note here that not everybody heard the sound, only the "devout" Jews. The non-believers and those who are indifferent to their living faith are not receptive to the grace of God and the manifested power of the Holy Spirit. When

the Holy Spirit arrived, divided tongues, as of fire, rested on each of the disciples. This is the Biblical sign of the divine presence. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability. As such, the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit is not only working through those who speak in tongues, but only through those who hear, each hearing in his own language. They could experience the presence of Jesus in his language, namely the language of Love.

In the second reading, Paul speaking to the Corinthians tells of the effects of the Holy Spirit in their lives. He says we cannot even call Jesus "Lord" unless we have his Spirit. To call Jesus "Lord" is not just uttering a pious phrase; it implies a real faith in who Jesus is and the proof of that will be in the way we live our lives. Secondly, the Spirit is the source of the special gifts or the 'charisms' which each member of the community receives. The Source of the gifts is one - the Spirit of God and that is what unites together all those who receive them into one community. But there is a huge variety of gifts. It is important to note that the gifts are not given as a personal grace for oneself. They are rather special abilities by which each one serves the needs of the community. We have all to work together, using our gifts, to build up the community to which we belong. Paul says that the believer enters through Baptism into communion with Christ's death, is buried with him, and rises with him. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. The baptized have put on Christ and through the Holy Spirit, Baptism is a bath that purifies, justifies, and sanctifies. Even though we are many in number but, through the working of the Spirit, we become like one body; in fact, we are the Body of Christ. Just as one body has many limbs and organs working together as a harmonious unit, so we as the Body of Christ each make our distinct contribution to the life and work of the community. Through the Spirit there is a close, warm, confident relationship with God who can be boldly addressed by the intimate term "Abba" Father.

The Gospel of today brings us to the Easter Day, the day of the Resurrection on the first day of the week. Jesus' disciples were hiding in fear behind locked doors. As colleagues of Jesus they are afraid they may have to face arrest or even worse. Suddenly, they experience the presence of Jesus among them. He gives them the usual Jewish greeting 'Shalom' or peace which is his gift to them and in the presence of Jesus they experience a kind of peace which only he can give. There

is an immediate transformation in the disciples, who till now were terrified, but suddenly are filled with joy. There are two qualities that always accompany the presence of Jesus in our lives - peace and joy. Now Jesus gives them the mission: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." The baton is being passed and the work has to continue. They have a job to do and it is exactly what Jesus himself came to do namely, to establish the Kingdom on earth. They have the task of continuing his mission on earth.

Jesus now breathes on them. The breathing recalls God breathing life into the dust and bringing the first human being into existence. Here too there is a kind of creation, as the disciples are re-created into the new persons. He gives them the power to forgive and to reconcile. This is their new task: to be agents of reconciliation, of people everywhere with their God and reconciliation with each other as brothers and sisters, children of one common Father. Reconciliation means the healing of wounds, of all forms of division. It is reconciliation that brings together all the diversity into one in the life of the Church and within any community or parish in the Church. Reconciliation is needed again and again—to reconcile not only divisions within the Church, but also those divisions that cause separation and can place one outside the Church and outside the Body of Christ. This is the work of the Kingdom. It is what we are called to do. He gives them power as he tells them that those whose sins they forgive, they are forgiven and those whose sins they retain, they are retained.

The church tells us of the seven gifts of the Spirit. The Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are the following: Wisdom - desire for the things of God, and to direct our whole life and all our actions to His honour and glory. Here we see God at work in our lives and in the world. Second, Understanding - enables us to know more clearly the mysteries of faith. It perfects a person's speculative reason in the apprehension of truth. Third, Counsel - warns us of the deceits of the evil one, and of the dangers to salvation. With the gift of right judgment, we know the difference between right and wrong, and we choose to do what is right. Fourth, Fortitude (courage) - With the gift of courage, we overcome our fear and are willing to take risks as a follower of Jesus Christ. It strengthens us to do the will of God in all things. Fifth, Knowledge - With the gift of knowledge, the Spirit enables us to discover the will of God in all things. Sixth, Piety (Reverence) - With the gift of reverence, sometimes called piety, we have a deep sense of respect for God and the church. And finally the seventh, Fear of the Lord (awe of God) - With the

gift of wonder, prayerful respect and awe we are aware of the glory and majesty of God. A person with such awe and wonder has perfect knowledge, perfect goodness, perfect power, and perfect love.

The feast of Pentecost marks the beginning of the Church. The activity of the spirit was the core understanding of the early church. The Spirit instructed the early missionaries and guided the proclamation of the mission of salvation. It was responsible for the conversions into new faith, gave them strength in times of persecutions, was the inspiration of the early journeys of Paul and others and was responsible for the inclusion of non-Jews into the church. All of God's saving activity till the end of times is due to the loving action of the Holy Spirit. Considering these factors and reflecting on the role of the spirit, the Second Vatican Council picks four images of the Church out 95 presented in the scriptures. They are New people of God, the Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit and the Sacrament of Salvation. Through the ministry of the church, whenever we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit's action in our lives we experience a little Pentecost. Only when we cooperate with our little Pentecost can we have the wonderful experiences of the first Christian Pentecost and live fully in the life of the Spirit. He will gather and reconcile the scattered and divided peoples; he will transform the first creation, and God will dwell there with men in peace.

Today's feast rounds off the tremendous mysteries that we have been commemorating since Holy Week - the Passion, the Death, the Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus culminates in the sending of the Spirit of the Father and the Son on his disciples. This feast has been the extraordinary intervention of God into our lives by what we can only call the "mystery" of Christ. Today's feast indicates that it is an on-going reality, which still touches our lives every single day. This week, let us reflect upon the purpose of the Holy Spirit in the Church. He can guide and teach us according to the purpose that He has been sent by the Lord God. Through the power of the Spirit we ask for the grace to be forgiven and the grace to forgive. As Jesus empowers his disciples with the new life of his Spirit, we look for the gift of Peace from the same Spirit.

'He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver.' This verse puzzled some women in a Bible study and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out the process of refining silver and get back to the group at their next Bible Study. As she watched the

silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities. The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot. The man said he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed. The woman asked the silversmith, 'How do you know when the silver is fully refined?' He smiled at her and answered, 'Oh, that's easy — when I see my image in it.' If today you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that God has His eye on you and will keep watching you until He sees His image in you.

Wishing to encourage her young son's progress on the piano, a mother took her boy to a Paderewski concert. After they were seated, the mother spotted a friend in the audience and walked down the aisle to greet her. Seizing the opportunity to explore the wonders of the concert hall, the little boy rose and eventually explored his way through a door marked "NO ADMITTANCE." When the house lights dimmed and the concert was about to begin, the mother returned to her seat and discovered that the child was missing. Suddenly, the curtains parted and spotlights focused on the impressive Steinway on stage. In horror, the mother saw her little boy sitting at the keyboard, innocently picking out "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." At that moment, the great piano master made his entrance, quickly moved to the piano, and whispered in the boy's ear, "Don't quit. Keep playing." Then leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around to the other side of the child and he added a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice transformed a frightening situation into a wonderfully creative experience. The audience was mesmerized.

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