

Pentecost - A
Acts 2:1-11;
I Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13;
John 20:19-23
Little Flower - 6/4/17

My Brothers and Sisters:

Today we celebrate Pentecost Sunday, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

All of us have mental images of God the Father and Jesus. I think it is much harder to imagine the Holy Spirit. I am not sure that the traditional image of a dove is helpful. Our faith teaches us that the love of God the Father and God the Son for each other is so alive, so vital, that this love is its own distinct person. The Holy Spirit, then, is the love of the Father and the Son for each other personified.

Today's readings, however, focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In today's reading from Acts, we see the transformative role the Holy Spirit played in the lives of the apostles. We can only imagine the apostles in the days between Jesus' Ascension and Pentecost. They were still keeping a very low profile. They were probably still very much afraid after what had happened to Jesus. However, once the Holy Spirit came upon them, they went out and began to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to the world.

We often talk about God's grace. Many of us have heard the phrase "There but for the grace of God go I." Those of us who are older remember hearing the phrase *sanctifying grace*. Grace, in fact, is God's life and love given to us as gift. Sanctifying grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit living within us has a transformative impact on our lives. In many ways, we can say that in the final analysis grace is our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit makes us sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of one another and deepens those relationships by calling forth the best in us, calling us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves.

In a homily a few weeks ago, I said that the Holy Spirit is the soul or life principle of the Church. The Holy Spirit is the principle of unity within the Church. This is the theme of today's reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. As Paul wrote, "*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...*" The first part of the reading, however, stresses that the Holy Spirit unites us to God and to one another notwithstanding all the differences among us and all the differences in gifts we receive. In fact, he reminds us that all the gifts and talents God gives us are not for us alone but to be shared with others for the common good.

The Holy Spirit, then, is given to us not simply for ourselves but for the mission of the Church so that we might share the Good News of Jesus with others as the Apostles did on Pentecost. When one juxtaposes the reading from Acts and the reading from First Corinthians, it is very evident that the Church is called to be both a community of intimacy and a community of mission. What is true for the Church universal is true for us as a parish. We are charged to balance our focus inward and our focus outward. Our focus outward should include both evangelizing as well as community outreach. Our focus inward focuses on building bonds of community and ministering to one another.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, today's Gospel recounts the institution of the sacrament of Reconciliation, tying it to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus "*breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.'*" The Holy Spirit living within each of us empowers us to forgive others, empowers us to be healers and reconcilers and bridge builders.