

Pentecost - A
Acts 2:1-11;
I Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13;
John 20:19-23
Little Flower - 6/8/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost. St. Augustine referred to Pentecost as the birth of the Church. All three readings give us insight into what it means to be Church.

Acts of the Apostles uses two images to capture the descent of the Holy Spirit: wind and fire. Wind suggests power, and fire suggests passion. Before his Ascension, Jesus promised that he would send the Holy Spirit upon the apostles to empower them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. The Holy Spirit gave the apostles the courage and the strength to go beyond themselves and to proclaim the Gospel whatever the cost to them. The Holy Spirit also gave them the passion to proclaim the Gospel with urgency and conviction. The apostles' speaking in tongues conveyed the inclusiveness and universality of the Gospel. The Gospel is meant for all people without exception.

During the last century, Catholics and Christians in the United States became complacent. Churches grew as the population of the United States grew. At one point, Little Flower had more than 5000 parishioners. Today Pope Francis is constantly reminding us that we cannot wait for people to come to us. Today the Church in the United States needs a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit to give us the strength, the courage, the motivation to change how we do things. Instead of waiting for people to come to us, we need to go out to them and invite them to become disciples of Jesus and members of our Church family. Sharing the Good News of Jesus needs to become our passion. We need to proclaim the Gospel with conviction by passionately living our faith.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, they did not go out as free agents. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..., and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.*" The Holy Spirit is the soul or life principle of the Church. The Holy Spirit is the source of unity in the Church. All the gifts that we have been given by the Holy Spirit are given to us not only for our own benefit but to build up and to rebuild the Church.

This reading suggests two conclusions. The Christianity of Jesus is a Christianity of Church. In his homily on May 15, Pope Francis was even more emphatic: "one cannot understand a Christian alone...a Christian without the Church is incomprehensible."¹ Second, Archbishop Tobin recently gave a talk to the College Theology Society. According to newspaper reports, he "warned that the divisive nature of the nation's politics — particularly the separation of people into disparate ideological camps — may be seeping into the American Catholic church, leading to a 'balkanization' of the faithful."² Pope Francis stresses the necessity of Church, and Archbishop Tobin challenges us to be a united Church.

Finally, in today's Gospel, Jesus empowered his apostles to forgive sins. However, Jesus did more than institute the sacrament of reconciliation. Forgiveness of sins was what Jesus was ultimately about. It was for the forgiveness of sins that he died for us. In instituting the sacrament of reconciliation, he empowered the Church to proclaim forgiveness to all people, to be a community of reconciliation, i.e., a community without walls and barriers, and finally to forgive sacramentally the sins of its members.

My brothers and sisters, today we pray, "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth."

¹Pope Francis, "Amid memory and hope," Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Thursday, 15 May 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2014/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20140515_memory-hope.html.

²Joshua J. McElwee, "Archbishop warns of 'balkanization' in US church," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 2, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/politics/archbishop-warns-balkanization-us-church>.