

Pentecost - B
Acts 2:1-11;
Galatians 5:16-21;
John 15:26-27; 16:12-15
Little Flower - 5/20/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and upon the Church. Pentecost is the 50th day of Easter.

According to Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles as tongues of fire. The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul enumerates nine of the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit. Finally, in today's Gospel, the Holy Spirit is described as the Advocate, the Spirit of truth.

When we think of fire, we think of passion. From secluding themselves in the upper room out of fear, the apostles immediately went forth to proclaim the Gospel to the world. Although the tongues of fire appeared over them, one might say that the tongues of fire also lit a fire under them. Second, the Holy Spirit transforms our minds and hearts. According to John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth will testify to Jesus and will lead us to a deeper understanding of Jesus' teachings about God, about us, and about God's plan of salvation for us. As the Spirit of love, the Holy Spirit will move us to live lives of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control which, in turn, will give powerful witness to the presence, power, and activity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in our world today.

The Catholic Church as a whole and Little Flower Parish are facing many challenges. A couple of years ago, there was a study which showed that more Catholics are leaving the Church than joining the Church. The Catholic Church is a sacramental church. Today, however, a majority of Catholics no longer attend Sunday Eucharist regularly. We can definitely see it here at Little Flower. Although our number of parishioners has not radically changed, attendance at our Sunday Masses has certainly declined. Another challenge is the even bigger number of young Catholics who no longer practice the faith. In the words of Pope Francis, confirmation has often become the "sacrament of goodbye" as adolescents "graduate" from confirmation programs and are never seen again. Finally, statistics also tell us that fewer Catholics are choosing to marry in the Catholic Church.

There is a wonderful book entitled *Divine Renovation: Bringing Your Parish From Maintenance To Mission*. As I thought about today's reading from Acts, it seems that was what the Holy Spirit did with the apostles on Pentecost. In the upper room, they were in maintenance mode. It was only after the coming of the Holy Spirit that they went forth into the world. All of the recent Popes from soon-to-be Saint Pope Paul VI to Pope Francis have stressed the importance of evangelization and re-evangelization. Evangelization and re-evangelization are not only the responsibility of priests and parish staffs but of all Catholics. This is why, for example, we offered the ChristLife program.

My brothers and sisters, today might be a good day for all of us to ask what Little Flower Parish needs to do to move from maintenance to mission. In other words, what do we need to change in ourselves and in our parish to become a truly missionary church? Because of Pope Francis, parishes and dioceses all over the world are asking themselves the same question. It is not that parishes and dioceses are not doing good things. This week Pope Francis said, "Our parishes must be capable of generating a people, that is, of offering and creating relationships where people feel that they are known, recognized, welcomed, listened to, loved..." As Fr. Aelred Cody wrote many years ago, "Among the constant, necessary concerns of all committed members of the Church is that of remaining faithful to our origins and to the purpose for which we exist, while adapting ourselves institutionally and individually to the requirements of our own times."