

Pentecost - A
Acts 2:1-11;
I Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13;
John 20:19-23
Little Flower - 5/28/23

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost. St. Augustine referred to Pentecost as the birth of the Church. At the Ascension, Jesus told his apostles to regroup in Jerusalem and wait for “*the promise of the Father....you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit*” [Acts 1:4-5].

Harvard poet Archibald MacLeish once wrote that symbols speak to us more powerfully than words or ideas. For example, the human heart is the symbol of love. To understand Pentecost, we need to picture the description of Pentecost in today’s reading from Acts:

And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues...

Wind suggests power, and fire suggests passion. The coming of the Holy Spirit was transformative for the apostles. 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. 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.

Today’s reading from Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians provides a theological explanation of the meaning of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the soul or life principle of the Church. Because we all share the one Spirit, all of us are one family in Christ. Therefore, we need to respect, love, and cherish all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. As Paul wrote, “*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.*”

St. Paul also reminds us that all gifts, human and divine, come from God: “*To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.*” According to a different translation, “*the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*” [NAB, 1970]. In other words, all the gifts God has given us have been given to us not just for our benefit but to be shared with others to build up the family of God. We might all want to ask what gifts we have that we should and could be sharing with others.

Today there is so much polarization in the Church and the world. It seems to me that God is asking us at this point in history to be instruments of healing, peace, and reconciliation, to be bridge builders rather than wall builders, in every community of which we are part. For most of us, this needs to begin with a conversion of mind and heart. Instead of looking for what divides us, we need to look for what unites us. When it comes to ideas, we need to presume benevolence on the part of others. We also need to avoid the either/or and all-or-nothing fallacies. We need to develop filters to screen what we take in and what we put out. We especially need filters when it comes to social media, one of the biggest contributors to polarization, but also in conversations with others. We have to learn to disagree without becoming disagreeable.

My brothers and sisters, on Easter Sunday evening when Jesus appeared to the disciples, his first words were “*Peace be with you.*” He then sent them out as the Father had sent him, bestowing the Holy Spirit upon them to empower them to bring peace to our world through the forgiveness of sins.