

PENTECOST 2017

Acts 2:1-11 The apostles, Mary & other disciples heard the sound of a mighty wind and tongues of fire came to rest on them

Psalms 104 "Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth."

I Corinthians 12:3-13 To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

John 20: 19-23 Receive the Holy Spirit. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

I was at a family funeral this week, and one of my cousins - who I had not seen since a family wedding 40 years ago - did not recognize me. She said, "Peter doesn't have all that gray hair." At least she didn't say, "Peter used to have hair."

We are here this morning at the end of a wonderful Alumni weekend. While I was at Siena as a student, I was encouraged to use all the gifts God had given me - one of them was music. So I want to begin reflecting on the feast today with a prayer set to music.

♪ SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD FALL AFRESH ON US (2x)
MELT US, MOLD US, FILL US, USE US.
SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD FALL AFRESH ON US. ♪

Today we hear the story of how the Spirit of God filled the Church and began a process we are still living out. Actually, we hear three stories:

The 1st is the story of how the Spirit of the Living God gave *birth* to the Church in Jerusalem when tongues of fire came on Peter and Mary and many other disciples of Jesus.

The 2nd is the story in St. Paul's letter of how different gifts are given to every person *for the common good* - that is, for the benefit of others as well as ourselves, to build up the whole body of Christ. We hear how all of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit. It is the story of how God still sends the Holy Spirit to us - in Baptism, in Confirmation & when we receive Communion.

The 3rd is the Gospel story of how Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into his disciples giving them and us the power to become instruments of peace, justice and forgiveness.

What happened at the first Pentecost and in the early Church is something like what happened to us at Siena. We received gifts. But we learned much more than information, & I once said about my class, the class of 1967, we never let school interfere with our education. We received gifts through the Friars - I remember Fr. Ben Kuhn, Fr. Peter Fiore (he was Fr. Amadeus then), Fr. Bernardine Teresi, Fr. David Bossman & many others. I was not only taught & inspired by the Friars, both in and out of the classroom, I became one of them.

And we received gifts from each other, from our classmates. I can say I made friends for life. Several of us met once a year for 30 years after graduation, until the families got too big to gather. You may have your own stories.

And the gifts we received we used for the common good - as teachers, as parents, as doctors, working in business, coaching, & many other vocations. The translation you heard in the 2nd reading is a little too literal. It reads, "for some benefit." I used the gift I received at Siena of being able to do research to look it up. The Greek is better translated as "for the common good." We used our gifts for our families, for our communities, for our co-workers, our churches, our world, & especially for the most needy. That's what the common good means.

And the Gospel we heard today was preached on campus, not only at Masses in the chapel but by the lives of so many Friars, staff and professors. We were offered the gift of peace and the challenge to be a reconciling presence in the world. We were given the tools to speak the truth to power and to love people one at a time. I still remember quoting a Peanuts character who said, "I love mankind, it's people I can't stand."

Today I would say that it is not enough to love humankind, I am called to imitate Jesus, and to do what so many of the people I met here did - the ones who loved me as a person.

Part of my way to contribute to the common good was, like some of you, to be part of the big brother program inspired by Fr. Gabe Snyder. After my graduation, I lost track of Bill, who was 13 when I first met him, but he came back into my life 30 years later. I was privileged to walk with him and his family through some difficult years and finally to do his funeral.

While at Siena I learned life lessons that opened my heart to reach out to a man who was incarcerated. I visited him for over 10 years in 3 different prisons. He was released this past July, and I asked for help from one of my Siena classmates who lived close to the prison. Lou had visited him while he was incarcerated and picked him up when he was finally released, bought him a pair of jeans that fit & drove him to where I lived so I could take him to his new residence in Brooklyn. These are some of the ways I have experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit through the relationships that began while I was at Siena. I am sure most of you have similar stories.

The same Spirit is still being poured out for all of us, & for our families and friends, whether this is our 5th or 10th or 25th or 50th reunion. We are still being called to use the gifts we have received - to pass on the peace, the light, the life and the love that have come from Christ through one another. We are called and empowered to pass those gifts on to our families, our children, grandchildren, neighbors, co-workers, communities and the world.

At the end of today's Gospel, Jesus says, *"Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you hold bound they are held bound."* That is a gift that is not just given to priests who hear confessions, it is a gift given to all of us - to all who pray in the Our Father, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." And the 2nd part of that gift is not so much the power to withhold forgiveness, it is the power to hold **sin** bound, to restrain the power of sin in others & the world.

I did some research again, and discovered that the Greek word translated "*to hold bound*" [the word is "krateo" - Fr. Nick, who taught Greek lit while I was here, would clobber me if I didn't say the word] can also mean "*to restrain.*" In short, Jesus has given his disciples the gift of being able to *restrain* the power of evil and so to begin to change the world, one person, one family, one community at a time.

The message I hear from today's feast of Pentecost is that we *have* received the Holy Spirit who gives the power to pray, to forgive, to make peace, to care for God's creation, to reach out to the poor, to discern God's will and to live as one human family. Once we know we have the power, we are faced with the choice of how we will use it. When Jesus says, "*Peace be with you,*" he is also asking, "*What are you going to do with it?*"

My prayer today is that the same Spirit we celebrate at Pentecost may be poured out on us at this Eucharist, and in our lives from this day forward.

♪ Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. ♪