

May 19, 2013 Our Lady of Fatima, Delanson

Acts 2:1-11 [They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in many languages]

Psalm 104 ["Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth"]

1 Corinthians 12:3-13 [The Spirit is given for the common good]

John 20:19-23 [Receive the Holy Spirit]

♪ 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. ♪

When I was at St Bonaventure University, I was working with a wonderful older Friar named Joe Doino & we chose that song for the dedication of a chapel at a spiritual center near the University named Mt. Irenaeus. As we talked about the song, I wanted to begin with the words, "Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me," since it seemed logical to begin with each one as an individual before singing "fall afresh on us." He said, "No, Peter, the Spirit comes to *us* first – though our connection with the rest of the Body of Christ, through the Church. Then it touches us as individuals who are never separate from Christ or from each other." Since that day, I have always begun that song with "fall afresh on us."

Today we hear the story of how the Spirit of God came to 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. So Pentecost is the birthday of the Church - we could sing: happy birthday to us!

The **2nd** is the story in St. Paul's letter of how different gifts are given to every person *for the common good*, and 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.

In today's Gospel the Holy Spirit does not come as a mighty wind. The Spirit comes when Jesus breathes on his disciples and says "whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven." Did you know that the word in Greek & Hebrew translated "wind" in the **1st** reading also means "Spirit" in the **2nd** reading and "breath" in the Gospel? So when Jesus breathes on the apostles he is sending his Holy Spirit. It is a gift of peace from Jesus. It is the *grace* of reconciliation. It is a gift that we are given so that we can accept the mercy of Christ and let him forgive us. It is a gift that gives us the power - the *response - ability*, the ability to respond to the gift of forgiveness by forgiving others. It is a gift that gives us the power to pray the Our Father and say, "*forgive us our trespasses..... as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" It is grace that gives us the ability to engage in the sometimes painful process of reconciliation in the face of real sin and evil. Without that grace there would be no Church, then or now, because reconciliation makes the community a place of peace, a place where Christ is present.

But this gift is also a warning. Jesus says, "*whose sins you hold bound, they are held bound,*" This does not contradict the readiness of Jesus to forgive and his clear command to forgive 70 times seven times. The Greek word he uses is "krateo", which means to *restrain* as well as retain. That's why I used the translation that says, "*whose sins you shall hold bound they are held bound*" in today's Gospel. One of the ways of hearing his words is to hear a promise that the power of evil cannot destroy the community of believers.

Sin remains sin, even when forgiven. To forgive is not to excuse. We need to name the sin we see in ourselves. We need to resist the evil within us and around us. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit destroys the power of evil to harm us, the spirit holds it bound, even when we are facing war or scandal or profound change. We are given this power to pass on to the world.

God sent the Holy Spirit the apostles and to Mary and to the women and men we hear about in the first reading - who were gathered in one place, in Jerusalem. And the same God sends the same Spirit to you and I as well. St. Paul makes that very clear in the 2nd reading.

The Holy Spirit is sent TO all and FOR all. The same Holy Spirit is poured out on the young and the old, Italians & Irish, Mexicans & Americans, Africans & Asians; women & men, rich & poor, Republicans & Democrats, gay & straight, married & single, healthy & ill. Today's feast is a call to accept that spirit in my heart, and to respect the same spirit in yours. Today's feast is a call to **be church**.

When I was young my father made me go to church, but as I grew in my understanding of how much God loves me, I began to hear the call to be a living member of the Body of Christ.

We live in a time of change. Parishes are merging and being transformed. Some buildings are being renovated and some are being sold or torn down. We are being invited to see the church more the way St. Paul did. If he came to a town and asked where the church was, and they showed him a building, he would collapse laughing. In his time, there were no buildings, only living communities of people who loved one another and who met in one another's homes. We are being called to let the Holy Spirit re-create us in the image of that first gathering in Jerusalem, in the image of the Body of Christ which met in Corinth, in the image of the disciples in their borrowed lodging in the upper room.

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 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.

We began with the song, Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on US. I sang it that way because we first receive the Spirit through the Church. But that gift has to be accepted by each one of us personally if we want to receive the peace Jesus offers and to be instruments of that peace to change the world. So I invite you to pray the song by singing "fall afresh on ME."

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