

Pentecost Sunday 2015 May 23-24, Our Lady of Hope, Fort Plain NY

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*

Psalm 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*

♪ Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us, Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.
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 came to the Church and began a process we are still living out - that is why we sang, "Spirit of the living God, fall **afresh** on us.

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 women & men who were disciples of Jesus. So Pentecost is the birthday of the Church - 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. [A few verses were omitted in the Lectionary passage, I have included the whole reading at the end of this reflection] 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.

Today's readings are different ways of looking at the Mystery of Pentecost & Easter - from the perspective and theology of **Luke, Paul & John**. We have been celebrating Easter for 50 days, and this feast is still part of the Easter season. The 3 readings are not contradictory accounts of the mystery of Pentecost, they are different ways of mining the depths of the Easter/Pentecost Mystery in our own lives.

In today's Gospel - which is part of the same Gospel of John that is read on the 2nd Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday, 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 Hebrew word translated "Spirit" [**Rûah**] also means "wind" and "breath"? 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 mean it, especially the words, "*forgive us our trespasses.... as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" It is the 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. It has a stink to it which remains. To forgive a person is not to excuse the sin. We are called to act like Jesus, to love the sinner while hating the sin. The words about holding sin bound are part of the promise of Jesus 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. In the ritual for Baptism in years past, the priest breathed 3 times on the infant's face as a prayer to protect the child or adult from the power of evil.

In the first reading - Luke's account of the beginnings of the Church in the Acts of the Apostles - God sends the Holy Spirit to the disciples 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 - addressed to the people of Corinth who were having trouble knowing how to use the gifts God had given them. Some were claiming that their gift was more important than that of others - they were in competition, in a way. But that doesn't happen today, does it?

Paul makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is sent TO all and FOR all. The same Holy Spirit is poured out today 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. As I continues to seek to follow God's call, I accepted the gift of the Spirit that led me to join a Franciscan community and to serve in priestly ministry.

We live in a time of change. Parishes have been merged and are being transformed. 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.

In the Eucharistic Prayer we will pray in a few moments, there is a prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit both *before* and *after* the words of Jesus at the Last Supper: Listen for it. Before the words of Jesus, we pray: Father, "*Send down your Spirit upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.*" And after the words of Jesus over the bread and wine, I will pray, "*Fill us with his Spirit [the spirit of Jesus] through our partaking of this banquet.*"

The meaning of these 2 prayers can be paraphrased as: "*Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to the world.*"

This hymn is a description of how we live that prayer in our lives:

♪ We are a pilgrim people, we are the church of God.
A family of believers, disciples of the Lord.
United in one spirit, ignited by the fire.
Still burning through the ages, still present in our lives. ♪

2nd Reading and the Gospel from the Feast of Pentecost

Brothers and Sisters,

No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

There are different gifts but the same Spirit;

There are different ministries but the same Lord;

There are different works

but the same God who accomplishes all of them in everyone.

To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one the Spirit gives wisdom in discourse,

to another the power to express knowledge.

Through the Spirit one receives faith;

by the same Spirit another is given the gift of healing,

and still another miraculous powers. Prophecy is given to one,

to another the discernment of spirits. One receives the gift of tongues, another that of interpreting the tongues.

But it is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as God wills.

The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body; and so it is with Christ.

It was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body.

All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit.

The Word of the Lord

(1 Corinthians 12: 3b-13)

On the evening of that first day of the week,
Even though the disciples had locked the doors
of the place where they were for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and
stood before them.

"Peace be with you," he said.

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

At the sight of the Lord the disciples rejoiced.

"Peace be with you," He said again.

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Then he breathed on them and said:

"Receive the Holy Spirit.

Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them,

Whose sins you hold bound, they are held bound."

- John 20:19-23 (Gospel for Pentecost)