

Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

Pentecost Sunday

May 20, 2018

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish



Today's Themes in Scripture

Today's readings begin with Luke's familiar description of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples gathered in the Upper Room. Luke used images of wind, sound, and fire to depict the Spirit's arrival. These symbols would have been readily understood by those who were familiar with Old Testament Scriptures; such were the ways in which God's presence had been perceived by the patriarchs and prophets. Immediately, the gifts of God's Spirit were evident in the gathered disciples: in an astonishing display of God's power, each disciple spoke in a language unknown to them. However, these new tongues were known to those who had come to Jerusalem from the far-reaches of the known world. Witnessing this extraordinary event, thousands would gather to hear Peter address them and thousands would be moved by his words to seek baptism. Those gathered in the Upper Room had heard Jesus' promise that, with the Spirit's arrival, they would be transformed and enabled to take on the mission of Jesus - to spread the Gospel and build his Church.

In the Second Reading, St. Paul reminds the Galatians that human nature, subject to the effects of sin, is in conflict with the ways of God. Even believers struggle with sinful impulses and desires that arise from their nature, corrupted by sin. Human nature, subject to sin, gives rise to what St. Paul called the works of the flesh, with consequences that destroy individuals and communities. God, however, has made a provision for our renewal in Jesus, through the Spirit. Those who are baptized into Christ are given the Holy Spirit as a help and guide. Those who walk in the Holy Spirit no longer need an external law to help them control their propensity to sin. Rather, the Spirit guides each believer to seek the ways of God. As believers follow the Spirit's guidance, their nature is renewed and transformed as they grow into conformity with Jesus. The fruits of the Spirit that Paul describes are nothing more than the characteristics of human life lived for God as modeled by Jesus. Just as today's Psalm attests, the Spirit, given to believers, has the power to give life and to renew it.

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave his disciples instructions to carry on his work, but they were far from ready for this mission. To help them, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit who would empower them to carry on after he returned to the Father. In today's Gospel, Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection. God had raised Jesus from the dead and the Holy Spirit had given him new life. Jesus breathed this same Spirit into the disciples. The power of his Spirit transformed the disciples. Through the Holy Spirit, the disciples would spread the Gospel, build a church, and change the world.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

Reading I: Acts 2:1-11

All were filled with the Holy Spirit.

- In the Acts of the Apostles, the story of Pentecost occurs on the fiftieth day after Passover, the day after seven Sabbaths.
- The strong wind recalls the mighty wind that swept over the waters at creation and the breath of life that God blew into the human being.
- The tongues of fire at Pentecost symbolize a new call and a new covenant.

Responsorial Psalm 104: 1, 2, 24, 35, 27, 28, 29, 30
Lord send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13

There are different gifts, but the same Spirit.

- In I Corinthians, Paul describes the unity of Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit.
- They are one body, breathing with the same breath.
- The gifts of each contribute to the life of the whole.

Gospel: John 20:19-23

As the Father sent me, so I send you.

- The Gospel reading portrays the timeless events of Jesus' resurrection and the descent of the Spirit.
- Jesus breathes on the disciples, creating them anew, and proclaims the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Filled with the Spirit, the disciples continue to spread new life and remedy the separation caused by sin as they forgive sins.

Reprinted with permission. LifelongCatechesis.OSV.com.

The Holy Spirit is the living water that quenches the thirst in our lives because he tells us that we are loved by God as his children, that we can love God as his children, and with his grace we can live as children of God, like Jesus. ~Pope Francis

Come Holy Spirit!

God's Goad

Luke's story-telling ability sparkles in the Pentecost story. He narrates it in what we might call the "energetic superlative." Luke portrays all of Jesus' disciples gathered when suddenly the sound of a wind (like the Creator Spirit of Genesis) fills the air and balls of fire hover like tongues over each of them. They are all filled with the Holy Spirit who leads them to proclaim their message in languages they had never studied, but happened to be those the pilgrims who heard them could understand. The two key elements of the story are the extraordinary influence of God's Spirit on the community and the breadth of the mission they were given the ability to accomplish. That helps us interpret Jesus' promise to send the Spirit to the disciples.

Jesus calls the Spirit "the Advocate." While Christian preachers have often taken that to mean that the Spirit is sinful humanity's advocate before God, Jesus seems to be saying just the opposite: The Spirit is God's advocate with humanity. The role of the Spirit is to be God's goad, reminding disciples of who they are and enabling them to fulfill their call.

To prepare for this celebration, we need to put our heart and soul into singing the refrain to Psalm 104. It takes courage and generosity to pray, "Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth." We are praying to the God of the Exodus, who called Moses to free the slaves and create a people of the covenant. The prayer also recognizes God as the Creator, the origin and destiny of life, the God who shares divine creativity with us.

We might imagine that the Pentecost disciples were praying something like Psalm 104 when the Spirit broke in on them. Whatever they might have been anticipating in their prayer, the Spirit's descent massively exceeded their expectations — and not only theirs, but those of the people who saw and heard what happened.

Luke wants us to realize that the disciples were suddenly on fire with their message. He doesn't give us precise details about the group's gift of tongues, but reading between the lines, we remember that the women and men it happened to were part of a tight-knit group who had traveled together and shared their faith and hope in Jesus. In both the literal and the symbolic sense of the idea, they spoke the same language.

When the Spirit exploded into their presence, they found themselves able, even impelled, to proclaim to others what it meant that Jesus was the good news, God's most explicit, most insistent, word of love and hope for the world, the supposed victim against whom evil and death had turned out to be impotent.

Not only were the disciples on fire with that message, but they were amazingly capable of sharing it with people with whom they had previously not been able to communicate. They found themselves united in a communion of hope and dreams, of faith and commitment, with people who literally did not speak their language.

Luke's rendition of the Pentecost story gives an overview of the Acts of the Apostles and the mission of the Church. It relates how the Spirit can enable disciples to touch hearts and build communities of faith among people all over the world. The Spirit who enflames disciples reveals how, as Gabriel had told Mary at the beginning of Luke's Gospel, nothing is impossible for God.

Today we are invited to join with the disciples who gathered in Jerusalem after Jesus' return to the Father. The world around them seemed to be the same as it had been two months before, but they were different enough to allow themselves to be set on fire by God's Spirit. If they had not been open to God's goading Spirit, Christianity would have died at its birth. Instead, they carried the message of God's relentless love throughout the world and for 2,000 years others have continued to carry it forth.

The readings present Pentecost as, what I would call, the "Feast of Limitless Possibilities." Pentecost challenges us to ask ourselves if we are courageous enough to harbor the open-ended expectations demanded of anyone who prays, "Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth." The feast asks if we are generous enough to give ourselves to spreading the fire of God's love in a world as needy as it has ever been.

We have been promised the Spirit who can renew the face of the earth. When we invite that Spirit into our world, we must do it with our whole heart or not at all. God is goading us, but we have to decide if we are willing to carry fire.

Sr. Mary McGlone, Used with permission. Celebration Publication.