

Pentecost Sunday - 2008

Today, our great fifty-day celebration of the Lord's death and resurrection reaches its climax as we gather to celebrate the Pentecost event, the Lord sending God Holy Spirit to the Church, the people of God.

We use the elemental symbol of fire to remind us that the Holy Spirit lives in us as energizing power, as divine love.

Homily.

Come, Holy Spirit, enkindle the hearts of your faithful people, renew, recreate, the face of the earth! Enkindle: set fire to. This prayer affirms our belief that the presence of the Holy Spirit, in us and in our world, brings about powerful changes.

We celebrate the presence of God Holy Spirit, the all powerful God, present among us and within us, in a very active and dynamic way. In Genesis we read: The Spirit moved over the waters and they were filled with life. In Luke's gospel we hear the Angel Gabriel say to Mary: the Holy Spirit will overshadow you and you will conceive a son. And in our creed we affirm our faith that the Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of life. The coming of the Holy Spirit into the disciples on Pentecost is truly the new creation. This marks the beginning of the second and final age in the history of our world.

But let us take a minute to reflect on Pentecost. The word means "fiftieth," and refers to the fiftieth day after Passover. This was originally a Jewish festival celebrating the barley harvest. Over time, it was given a theological significance and became a celebration of God's gift of the Torah on Mount Sinai and God choosing the Jewish people to be his own people.

It was during this Jewish celebration that the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples of Jesus, making his appearance known by the sound of a mighty wind and by a fire storm.

The Hebrew word *ruah* means breath, wind, and spirit. It is translated into Greek as *pneuma*, and Latin as *spiritus*. Because spirit means breath, spirit also means life. Because it means wind, we understand why the spirit manifested itself as a mighty wind, and we also understand that the Spirit is power. Fire reminds us that the Spirit is the source of love as well as energizing power.

The spirit cannot come to anyone without really transforming us.

This is in many ways our greatest feast, for today we celebrate the fulfillment of God's saving plan, the birth of the new people of God, This is the reason Jesus was born in time, lived, died and rose again. Pentecost is the goal of all of salvation history.

And it touches us personally, for through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are members of the body of Christ. Jesus' death and resurrection and the gift of the Spirit transform us into other Christs, and enable us to be the instruments he uses to bring the kingdom of God to its fulfillment. The Spirit is here to transform us for mission!

But God never forces himself on us. He respects the freedom he has given us. Like Mary at the Annunciation, the Holy Spirit doesn't come to us unless we say "yes" and open our hearts to receive him.

Today's scripture readings focus on three of the gifts the Spirit gives us that transform and empower us for Christ's mission. In the gospel, we see Jesus use the element of breath/wind as a sign that the Spirit has been given to the disciples, and the Spirit empowers us to forgive and reconcile. These are works that Jesus did during his ministry, and works that he now empowers us to do for one another.

In the sacrament of reconciliation, the prayer of absolution says: God has sent the Holy Spirit to us for the forgiveness of sins. But the spirit also empowers us to forgive each other.

My sisters and brothers, we must forgive and be reconciled! And we can, because we are empowered to do so by God's all-powerful spirit.

In our first reading from Acts, we see how the Spirit makes the disciples fearless and bold, to proclaim the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. The Spirit gives them the gift of tongues and languages so they can communicate, so all can hear and understand the good news and become united, be the new people of God. The Spirit uses the proclamation and acceptance of faith in Jesus as the means for the Church to grow.

And in the second reading, Paul celebrates the power of the Spirit to bring unity in diversity, and to celebrate the diversity of gifts that enable every member of the body of Christ to contribute to building of God's kingdom. This does not mean that we are to be homogenized or made identical. We retain the unique and special aspects of our individuality and our cultures, but we strive to be united in mind and heart, in truth in love. And this means we are willing to listen and try to understand those who are different, and not be afraid to

share our truth and beliefs with them. My sisters and brothers, the Spirit is here to transform us for mission!

These three gifts of the Spirit are, boldness, forgiveness, and unity. Christ came to bring salvation to all. Not to do this in a way that makes us feel superior, but to carry out our roles as servants to the world.

We are to allow the Holy Spirit to renew and empower us to live more fully as other Christs.

We are celebrating the gift of the Holy Spirit who lives in us and empowers us to carry on Christ's mission.