

Homily-Pentecost09

Pentecost marks the end of the Easter Season. As a parish we have celebrated over forty days of Lent. We celebrated a Season of fasting, prayer and almsgiving. This Lent Martha Gaynoe of Catholic Relief Services visited our parish in order to help us focus on these spiritual practices.

We ended Lent on Holy Thursday evening and on that night we looked ahead to the death of the Lord as did Jesus when he ate his Last Supper with his apostles. We celebrated the death of the Lord and its meaning for us on Good Friday. We waited and reflected on Holy Saturday and on the Easter Vigil we celebrated the new life that we experience as a result of the resurrection of our Lord. We have just celebrated the Ascension of Our Lord and now we celebrate Pentecost the Feast of the Sending of the Holy Spirit and the Birthday of the Church.

Many of the meetings of our parish begin with the reading and discussion of the readings of the upcoming Sunday. At the Pastoral Council meeting this past Tuesday we listened to the Gospel for Pentecost. As the various members of the Pastoral Council discussed the meeting one of the members indicated that he had prayed that the Holy Spirit would come into his life and he felt a feeling of frustration as the Holy Spirit had not answered his prayer. This person is someone who has been a parish leader for some time. He is very involved in parish ministry and making a difference in the lives of the poor and vulnerable outside of our parish. I was surprised to hear him say that he did not feel that he had received the Holy Spirit. I told him that I saw the Holy Spirit alive in his leadership and his service of others.

You may feel the same way. It is imperative that I say on this Feast of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit is the giver of gifts. I know that many parishioners are becoming aware of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is important to begin this homily by remembering that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are many and varied. We sometimes focus on a few gifts of the Holy Spirit. We may think about the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit that are listed in the Book of Isaiah or the few gifts that Paul lists in his letters. It is imperative that we remember that the Spirit blesses us with gifts of service, leadership, prayer and teaching. The Spirit gives us gifts to be strong and loving fathers and mothers; faithful members of church communities and individuals who can share their faith with others.

The gifts of the Spirit are anything but limited. The Spirit gives us the gifts that we need to lead the faith to which God calls us.

What do the readings of today's Mass teach us about the Holy Spirit?

Acts of the Apostles

Our traditional image of the coming of the Holy Spirit is taken from the Feast of Pentecost described in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. The disciples are gathered in prayer after Jesus had ascended on high. The disciples have been in prayer since the ascension. Luke portrays how God begins to restore the remnant of his people who gathered around Jesus. Through a driving wind and tongues of fire Luke shows the spiritual transformation which takes place in the lives of the disciples through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is a Spirit of Peace, Reconciliation and Forgiveness. On Pentecost the Spirit brings about unity for the Jews of many nations who were in Jerusalem. The first manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit is the bold preaching of Peter and the apostles to the Jews who stood outside the Upper Room. The Spirit changes the disciples from men of fear to men who were able to boldly proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. When the Spirit comes down on the apostles they speak in new tongues and walls are broken down between the Jews of various nations. The apostles are now able to bring the Good News to the ends of the earth. The real event of Pentecost is the empowerment of the disciples.

Letter to the Corinthians

Our understanding of the working of the Holy Spirit is often shaped by this letter to by the letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. Paul first of all says that God does not randomly give the gift of the Holy Spirit but that the manifestation of the spirit is given for some benefit. The unlimited number of gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit are given that we might build up our church community and complete the work to which we have been called by God. Paul writes that gifts are given for the up building of the church, administration, assistance to ones neighbor, as well as healing and communicating God's truth.

Paul is writing to the Corinthian community. This was a community that was very charismatic in its worship. Paul reminds the Corinthian community that the greatest way for their spiritual lives is love. In I Corinthians 13 Paul describes the characteristics of love. Paul indicates that love needs to be central to their lives.

Love is not merely a virtue that keeps balance in our use of spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit is characterized by love and thus can give us the ability to live a life of love. Next weekend we will celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. Augustine said that the God is lover, beloved and the love that they share. In this model of the Trinity the Holy Spirit is the love of God. In the Prayer to the Holy Spirit we pray, **“Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love.** Send forth thy Spirit and they shall be created and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.” Again the Holy Spirit is seen as the source of God’s love. The theologian Karl Rahner has written that the Holy Spirit shows that God is ours. The gift of the Holy Spirit shows that the love of the all-holy God has become our center. God is our God and dwells within. The Holy Spirit is the giver of many gifts but the fundamental gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of love and the Holy Spirit is the love of God.

Letter to the Galatians

In his letter to the Galatians Paul writes that the human being is under two forces, the flesh and the spirit. The flesh is the aspect of the person under the influence of sin and death while the spirit is the aspect open to the movement of the Spirit of God. Paul offers a list of sins having to do with sexual immorality, idolatry, failings in interpersonal relations and debauchery. He says that people who do such things will not enter the kingdom of God. Paul then lists the fruit of the Spirit and indicates that they come from the work of the Spirit in one’s life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. That which helps us live out our Christian life comes not so much from our natural goodness but instead from the work of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel of John

Our Gospel provided a second account of the sending of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel of John, Jesus gives over his Spirit both on the cross but also immediately after his resurrection. In the Gospel we have just heard the disciples are huddled together in locked room filled with fear as they are afraid they will be subject to hatred, insult and death since they are followers of Jesus.

Jesus enters the room where the disciples are hiding and brings his peace. Despite seeing the risen Christ the disciples do not believe that this is Jesus who accompanied them while he was on earth. Jesus breathes on his disciples on Easter evening saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” He revivifies them in a way that recalls the Creator bringing to life the first human being by blowing into the nostrils the breath of life. The risen Christ then shows them his hands and side.

The risen Christ empowers the disciples with the Spirit to continue his mission of forgiveness to free hearts locked in fear. Jesus empowered the apostles and us with a Spirit of reconciliation. They are empowered to forgive sins and in so doing reconcile believers with God.

Jesus sends the disciples out. They are to be to the world what Jesus has been to the world. Jesus takes frail disciples and makes them holy through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of John reminds of that the disciples were frail and they were able empowered by Christ. John's Gospel reminds us that Christ empowers us in our frailty and brokenness. We are called to not let our frailty be an obstacle to living out our God's will in our lives

Not only does the Holy Spirit empower the disciples so that they can preach the Good News after the resurrection. John presents the Holy Spirit as well as the guide to all truth. During the Last Supper Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete. In Greek Paraclete means advocate, counselor, comforter and defense attorney. The first Paraclete text speaks of the Advocate as the Spirit of truth that guides us to all truth. In this reading the Spirit witnesses to Jesus. The second Paraclete text promises that the Spirit will guide the followers of Jesus, declare what is coming and glorify Jesus. In the Johannine text the Spirit acts as a stand-in for the earthly Jesus and sees to it that the movement started by the earthly Jesus will continue and flourish.

Since the Holy Spirit is both the guide to all truth and a witness to Jesus we should pray often for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

How do we receive the Holy Spirit?

Pentecost did not merely happen 2,000 years ago but instead our entire Christian lives are to take place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If our entire lives are to take place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit how do we welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives? Of course the initial answer must be that we first received the Holy Spirit into our lives in our baptism. While the Spirit is present in our lives we can stifle the presence of the Holy Spirit. In order that the Holy Spirit will continue to be a daily force in our lives we must both pray and daily turn our lives to God. Through prayer and conversion we remain open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Let us remain open to the Holy Spirit so that God will be able to change the world through us.