

Reflection for Pentecost C

We have expectations of how the Holy Spirit acts. Often it involves special effects, extraordinary interventions and miraculous manifestations. But really, how often do we witness anything like that? Magic is not at the heart of our Church. Faith in God and in Jesus is our center. Since Jesus is always near, but a thought away, the Spirit doesn't intervene as much as dwell with us, amid the events of our lives as we live life. God accompanies us wherever we go.

What is Pentecost all about? Most Christians are surprised that it is originally a Jewish and not a Christian feast. We Christians owe a great deal to our roots in ancient Judaism. It is also known as Shavuot in Hebrew, which translates as Weeks in English. Pentecost is ancient Greek for fifty. Pentecost is fifty days, or several weeks after Passover. Judaism still celebrates Shavuot, since Judaism is also, with us, a living and active faith. Fifty days after Passover people celebrated the first wheat harvest of late spring. They related the first harvest of grain to God's promise. They arrived and God's people had to eat. Think of our feast of thanksgiving.

As the People of God matured, Shavuot or Pentecost became more closely connected to Passover. Passover celebrates Israel's release from slavery in Egypt, the passing over of the Angel of Death that slew the Egyptians' First Born, and the journey of the nation to the Promised Land. Pentecost celebrates the covenant between God and God's people atop Mount Sinai. There God gave the Law which is the sign of the covenant. "I will be your God and you will be my people." Today, the Israelis remember their present constitution's implementation on Pentecost too; bringing their religious faith into their secular lives; combining, as if for us, Easter and the Fourth of July into one feast.

Our Pentecost celebrates a similar and uniquely Christian theme. All Christian people celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the believers of Jesus fifty days after Easter, hence the same name. The Spirit transformed this small band of people into the Church of Jesus. Jesus' resurrection was the sign of salvation he had won for us by his cross. Pentecost is the culmination of the salvation of his followers. All they need for it is faith in God and in Jesus. The coming of the Spirit ensured our faith's transmission to us in our time. Today is the Church's birthday. When I say Church, I mean to say the People of God who believe in God and Jesus. This includes us, here at Divine Savior, St. Eugene, Our Lady Mother of the Church, all Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox Christians. It is our hope that one day all people will become believers. Jesus made a promise that all will be one.

Let me go interactive here. How many people are looking forward to us closing at the end of June? Let me ask another question. How many people are excited about forming a new combined parish? There's a lot at stake here. Can we afford to hesitate? Can we afford to fail? Divine Savior, Our Lady Mother and St. Eugene are all closing. All of us, in these three parishes grieve. We are all very comfortable where we are, thank you very much! Why do we close completely and the other two stay open? We are the mother parish out of which formed the other two? We are all closing as parishes. There will be two worship sites, after we shut down as a third site come Labor Day.

Why is it us, at Divine Savior who will close? We are, after all the Mother Parish for the other two! Look at our property on Google Maps or Earth. Our three buildings sit on a prime square block. We've already sold a parcel of the property for a pretty penny, as we published in the bulletin at the time. Think about this; all three parishes have operated on deferred maintenance for decades. That means that we all have put off necessary and on-going repairs

until a pipe breaks, the roof leaks, or our radiators burst in really cold weather. How many times have we experienced these catastrophes in the past few years? Once a year, at least. They have happened at St. Eugene and Our Lady Mother too. Tuck pointing alone costs a fortune. Take a look at ours when you leave today. All three parishes are strapped for cash to effect repairs. The sale of this site will enable our new parish to have a pretty good nest egg to invest or to affect repairs. Hear this well; the sale of the property of Divine Savior is our first gift and investment in the new, and yet unnamed parish. Our first gift; let that sink in. That's true even as we grieve. It's also, for us, an act of good faith! We offer our own property to the new parish. This is our human sacrifice that mirrors Jesus sacrifice for us. We offer our own home to build the new community. We, however, are the true gift. Our persons, talent and very presence will build a new parish. The impact of this mission gives me shivers; and hope!

Having been a pastor of another cash-strapped place, I took the good advice of the finance council to invest such money first and then repair. Our new Parish will need advisors with experience. We will need ministers with experience. We will need each other as members. These are the other gifts we bring. As we belong here, also, we belong to the wider and universal Church of Jesus. We can never forget the bigger picture. We are all bound for the Kingdom of God. A new parish is but a steppingstone.

This will be our parish. We are not joining them nor are they joining us. We will become one, new parish together. Our Lady Mother of the Church will be the western worship site. But within a year, if we falter and fail in our joint endeavor, they will close too. As I said, there's a lot at stake.

Let me diverge. This is a homily, not a sermon. Today's message is the Good News of Salvation. (We call it the gospel.) Forget the special effects of the wind and fire for a moment. What did the disciples hear? We live too close to O'Hare; we know what loud noise shaking our homes is like. It wasn't a loud noise they heard. It was the gospel of salvation through faith and the forgiveness of sins. What was the driving force that led these frightened people into the streets to share and preach it? It wasn't a flame singeing their hair. We've all smelled that. It was the fire of faith in their minds, hearts and bellies. Haven't we heard the same news, the gospel? Isn't our faith the center of our lives? Doesn't the Spirit of Jesus fill us? We know Jesus in our midst whenever we gather. We know him as we break bread and share Jesus' Body and Blood.

This is the same Jesus. We share the same Spirit. We have the same faith. We are not much different than those first followers of the Lord. They left the comfortable confines of the Upper Room where they stayed safe and secure. Had they remained there, only, they would pass on nothing and what they shared together would be an end in itself. We would never exist. They knew the mission and acted; leaving their four walls of security to step out into uncertainty which has resulted in our gathering in faith. This is powerful and exciting stuff. Can you feel it? I asked, "CAN YOU FEEL IT?" I do! And I am entering into this new community. Can you come too?

This is our mission too. This is the real gift we bring with newness of life. The gifts of the Spirit are not for the benefit of the few huddled within these four walls. They benefit the entire human race, of which there is only one. I trust you. Your support of me in my efforts to serve you is all the evidence I need to know that we've got all we need for success; the same gifts the disciples had; Faith, the Spirit and Community. I will call these three gifts Holy Faith. Which, I believe, can also be a good name for our new home. We can go together with this in mind. Let's

witness to the new parish that the people of the former Divine Savior love each other and are united in this new journey.

May the Holy Spirit guide us and the love of Jesus light our way.

James D. Beath

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FIRST READING: Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

Alleluia.

Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD, my God, you are great indeed! How manifold are your works, O LORD! the earth is full of your creatures;

Alleluia.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD be glad in his works! Pleasing to him be my theme; I will be glad in the LORD.

Alleluia.

If you take away their breath, they perish and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.

Alleluia.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians:

Brothers and sisters: No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in

everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: John 20:19-23

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

The Gospel of the Lord.