

Homily – Pentecost

Today is different from most big feasts in the Church: We don't hang lights or exchange gifts. We don't wear fancy hats or eat lots of candy. There are no big Pentecost sales. But maybe there should be.

Part of that may be because the one who dwells at the center of this great feast, the Holy Spirit, is surprisingly low key. Despite arriving with a roaring of wind and tongues of fire, the Spirit is very much someone who likes to stay in the background, who works behind the scenes.

To many of us, the Holy Spirit seems to be the quietest member of the Blessed Trinity. After all, in sacred scripture, the Father speaks often, and so does Jesus. But you'd be hard-pressed to find famous quotes from the Holy Spirit. It sometimes seems as if the Spirit is the Trinity's silent partner.

But today, I'd like to suggest that, in fact, the Spirit does speak. Eloquently. Passionately. Fearlessly.

It began in the Acts of the Apostles, and the account of Pentecost: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim."

Moments after his descent, the Spirit gave the disciples a voice – a voice that could not be contained in that upper room. A voice that needed to be spread to the entire world. Despite the wide range of cultures and languages gathered in Jerusalem that day, everyone present heard and understood. Someone even exclaimed, incredulously: "We hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God." Those "mighty acts" transcend time, place, language, culture. God's work is infinite. It is "catholic" in the truest sense of what that word

means: it is universal. It is limitless. And it is timeless. Look around you and know this: Pentecost never stopped. It is still going on. Here and now. And every one of us is a part of it.

Pentecost is the parent bringing a newborn child to be baptized — bending over that font to see that first splash of water on the head of a child and hear the first astonished cry from a brand-new Christian.

Pentecost is the teenager approaching the bishop to have her head marked with oil — feeling the sense of pride and gratitude that comes with being confirmed, fully initiated in the Catholic Church.

But that is just the beginning. Pentecost is Mother Teresa bathing a beggar, Father Damien giving communion to lepers, Maximilian Kolbe stepping forward for a husband and father and saying, “Take me, instead.”

It is Father Ignatius Maternowski, who volunteered to parachute into France on D-Day, almost 80 years ago. While working to set up a hospital to treat the wounded of both sides, he was shot and killed by a German sniper — the only Catholic chaplain to die on D-Day.

Pentecost is all those who are expressing faith, hope and love in the face of persecution, martyrdom and war — and doing it today just as they did 2,000 years ago. Pentecost is more than just courage or defiance. It is hope. Resounding, tireless hope.

It is the tens of thousands around the world who entered the Church this past Easter, seeing beyond the scandals and betrayals of our own age to glimpse instead something wondrous and miraculous and beautiful — the grace of God, something as small and simple as a sliver of bread and as vast as the universe.

Our tradition tells us that Pentecost began 50 days after Easter. But nowhere in scripture does it say it ever ended. It goes on.

It goes on every time we leave this church carrying within ourselves the Body of Christ — becoming the body of Christ — to transmit the Gospel in the world, “glorifying the Lord with our lives.” Pentecost can’t be stopped. We Christians have been around for 2,000 years. But know this: the Holy Spirit is just getting started.

Come Holy Ghost, creator blest, and in our hearts take up thy rest.

Despite our problems, our weaknesses, our broken parts and sinful history, the Spirit continues to abide with us, support us, uplift us, encourage us. He raises up popes and saints, missionaries and martyrs — countless witnesses to God’s goodness in the world, a great cloud of witnesses that includes, incredibly, each of us.

So, Happy Pentecost. Savour the abundant gifts and graces of this day. Celebrate this day and give it its due. Remember God’s never-ending love for the human race and the Holy Spirit’s untiring commitment to us.

But remember, too, that it is more than just one day. On one day 20 centuries ago, the flames came. But the fire hasn’t stopped burning.