

Homily of Pentecost Sunday of Year A, 2020

Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 29-34; 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23

The Church was conceived when Jesus said to Peter, “You are the rock, upon you I will build my Church” (Matthew 16:18). But the Church was born on Pentecost Sunday with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles.

Among the Jews in the Old Testament, the feast of Pentecost was when Jewish pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem from various parts of the world: Europe, Asia and Africa to celebrate the festival of thanksgiving for the first fruits of their harvest (Numbers 28:26). While the crowds were celebrating, the apostles hid themselves in a room and stayed in prayer. We recall that after the death of Jesus, the apostles locked themselves up in a room. Jesus rose from the dead and took them out of the locked room. Before his ascension, he told them to go and wait in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit. The apostles returned to Jerusalem, and again locked themselves up in a room. It took the power of the Holy Spirit to finally break the lock that held the apostles. From then on, the apostles were liberated from the fear of the Jews.

In some ways, too, we are locked up. May the Holy Spirit break the locks and grant us freedom. We pray that the Church will prevail and emerge reborn and renewed after the catastrophic impact of Covid 19. Amen.

We read in the first reading, “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?’” One of the experiences of the apostles was that they spoke in different languages, in such a way that people from various parts of the world could understand them in their own language. In Genesis, God used language to disperse the builders of the Tower of Babel (Genesis: 11:1-9). During the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, God used language to unite all peoples. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is to preach the message of Christ in different languages in all parts of the world.

The celebration of Pentecost Sunday is a prayer for our individual Pentecost experience. We are praying for the renewal or revival of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us. Isaiah 11:2-3 names the following gifts: wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. I call these foundation gifts.

St. Paul names some other gifts which have been referred to as extraordinary or charismatic gifts: faith, healing, mighty deeds (miracles), prophecy, discernment of spirits, varieties of tongues (or languages), interpretation of tongues (or languages), apostleship (or discipleship), teaching, assistance, and administration (1 Corinthians 12:9-10, 28). These extraordinary or charismatic gifts are dependent on the foundation gifts named above.

The sign that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are effective and active are the lasting fruits they bear. St. Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 mentions some of the fruits as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

For many of us, it is true that the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed on us are either inactive or minimally active. For this reason, St. Paul urges us, “I invite you to fan into flame the gift of God you received through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6).

However, there are spiritual conditions that enable revival of the gifts and for us to experience personal or interior Pentecost. The first condition is as St. Paul urges us, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Ephesians 5:14). The second condition is as St. Paul, also, invites us, “Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:12).

Through the unction of the Holy Spirit, may we be able to wake up and rise. May we be able to throw off the works of darkness. May we be freed from where we are locked in. May the light of Christ shine on us that we may fan into flame the gifts God has given to us. May the gifts bear lasting fruits. Amen.

Let us sing:

*Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, and use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.*

(The one who sings, prays twice. – St. Augustine of Hippo)

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