

## **Homily of Pentecost Sunday, Year B, 2024**

**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 and empowered them to witness Christ.

Among the Jews in the Old Testament, the feast of Pentecost was when Jewish pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem from various parts of the world to celebrate the festival of thanksgiving for the first fruits of their harvest (Numbers 28:26). It was on such a feasting time that God chose to send the Holy Spirit so that people from various parts of the world would become witnesses of the event.

The first reading shows that while the crowds were celebrating, the apostles were in the upper room and stayed in prayer: "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."

One of the great miracles of the descent of the Holy Spirit is that God translated and transmitted the message of the apostles in Aramaic to the understanding of those who spoke other languages. The world is excited about Artificial Intelligence. We believers should be excited about Divine Intelligence which existed before the creation of the world. Imagine the Divine Intelligence behind the creation of the world!

The Pentecost event takes us back to Genesis, where God used language to disperse the builders of the Tower of Babel (Genesis: 11:1-9). On Pentecost, God used language to unite all peoples. One of the lessons of the events of the Tower of Babel and Pentecost is that what we communicate has the power to build or destroy, unite or scatter, give life or take life. What is the effect of my tongue? "Some wound as they speak, like swords; but the tongue of the wise heals" (Proverbs 12:18). Where do I belong? Wounding tongue or healing tongue?

The Holy Spirit in some people is either inactive or minimally active. Although many of us have received several Sacraments, we are like the believers in Ephesus whom Paul asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They answered him, "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:2). The celebration of Pentecost Sunday is a prayer for our individual Pentecost

experience. 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).

Unfortunately, some people have driven the Holy Spirit completely away from themselves and from their environment by their works of evil. We pray that such people may come to conversion.

In today's gospel, the disciples locked themselves up in a room for fear of the Jews. But Jesus passed through the locked doors, stood in their midst, and blessed them with peace and the power of the Holy Spirit. He replaced their fear with strength and courage. They were liberated from self-imprisonment.

Fear, or guilt, or shame, or self-pity, or anger, or unforgiveness, or failure, or inadequacy, or sin, or despair can keep us self-imprisoned. Someone may have been locked up by spiritual or physical forces beyond his or her control. May our celebration today bring us Pentecost experience and free us from every imprisonment. St. Paul declares for us, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). May we receive God's peace, which surpasses all understanding to guard our hearts and our minds in Jesus Christ. (Philippians 4:7).

Jesus breathed on the apostles and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:23). Today's gospel explains the power given to priests by the Church, at the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to declare a person's sin forgiven by God. The priest prays for the penitent: "God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God grant you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Also, we have the power to forgive or to retain sins. If we refuse to forgive, we retain the sins in us. Some people's huge burden, weighing on them, is not only their own sins but the retained sins of other people they are carrying. Retained sins prevent Pentecost experience. Therefore, let us purge ourselves not only of our own sins but also of other people's sins we have retained so that we can have Pentecost experience.

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