

The Feast of Pentecost, May 31, 2020

Today is the Feast of Pentecost. On Pentecost we celebrate what is often called the birthday of the Church. So, happy birthday to each of you! Today we also bring to completion our celebration of the Paschal Mystery -- *the suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming of the Spirit of Jesus's on the disciples*. In our Liturgy of the Word today we hear two different accounts of the Giving of the Spirit. As we read them the writers use many different symbols. I will try to explain each symbol as it arises.

Our *First Reading* is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. In this account, the twelve apostles are all gathered in the Upper Room at the Feast of **Pentecost**, a Jewish feast, which occurs **50** days after Easter. The first symbol used in this reading is the sound of a mighty wind which comes from heaven and fills the whole room. The word for "wind" and the word for "spirit" in Greek is the same, so this wind sound clearly indicates the Spirit of God is among them. Then, there appeared tongues of fire which rested on the head of each one present. The tongues of fire were a symbol of God's presence among them. You may recall that God spoke to Moses out of the burning Bush also you may recall that in the Book of Exodus when the Israelites wandered through the desert they were always accompanied during the night by a pillar of fire. Thus, the tongues of fire on Pentecost were a sign that God was with them. For example, because of the Holy Spirit's presence in them, when the disciples left the Upper Room to speak to the crowds, each person in the crowd understood them in their own language. Hence, the message of Pentecost is for all people.

The *Gospel* reading chosen for today is taken from St. John. It is a much different account of the Coming of the Spirit on the disciples. It is the evening of **Easter Sunday** and the disciples are in the Upper Room with the door firmly locked for fear that they might be arrested. Fear and anxiety are prevalent among them. All of a sudden Jesus is in their midst. "*Peace be with you,*" he says. This is the normal Jewish greeting but now it is full of much more significance. Jesus then shows them his wounds in his hands and his feet. With that their fears are changed to joy and Jesus gives them their mission: "*As the Father sent me, so I send you.*" Then Jesus breathes on them. "Breath" is the symbol of life. The disciples are given the power to forgive sins as Jesus says: "*Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive are forgiven.*" With this power to forgive sins they are given their ultimate mission namely, to bring all people to God and don't forget this is our mission, too.

In the reading from *1Corinthians* we hear: "*No one can say Jesus is the Lord, except in the Spirit.*" We are the people of the Spirit and as people of the Spirit we are called to service. God is working in us to bring His love to our world. In this reading Paul compares the People of God to a human body. Our bodies are made up of all different parts, but each part is ordered to the well-being of the one body. So, each of us have our own gifts and talents and each of us are called to use these gifts for the glory of God.

To make this homily on this feast of Pentecost personal we need to reflect on the particular role that God has for each of us and reflect on what each of us can do to reach other people with the message of God's love for them. Happy Pentecost, Happy Birthday of the Church.