
Homily for the Feast of Pentecost

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Atlanta, Georgia
The Feast of Pentecost- Year C

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting."

This morning we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost—the 50th day of our Easter season. We just heard in the Book of Acts how the Holy Spirit was given to the followers of Jesus. People from all over the world who were in Jerusalem for the Jewish Festival of Pentecost were surprised to hear someone speaking their own language so far from home. Parthians and Libyans and residents of Mesopotamia—in other words, everyone from the known world—all were ecstatic about the mighty acts of God. Before the day was done the church had grown from 120 to more than three thousand. Soon these followers were able to speak like Jesus did, and they were able to bring healing to those who were sick, like Jesus did. God's breath now gave them new life. It was time for God to be born again—not in one body this time but in a body of believers who would receive the breath of life from their Lord and pass it on to others.

The Book of Acts is the story of their adventures, kind of like a Gospel of the Holy Spirit. In the first four books of the New Testament we learn the good news of what God did through Jesus Christ. In the book of Acts, we learn the good news of what God did through the Holy Spirit.

Of the three persons of the Trinity, I think it's the Holy Spirit which is the hardest to define. Most of us can describe the other two: God the Father, creator of heaven and earth, who makes the sun shine and the rain fall. God the Son, who was human like us: our savior, teacher, helper and friend. But how would you describe God the Holy Spirit for a child? "The Spirit blows where it chooses," he said in John's Gospel, "and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." That's about right.

The Church teaches that the Holy Spirit is given to us in our baptism, and this is why Pentecost is one of our baptismal Sundays (and Thomas Bryant Bateman is baptized into Christ's Church at 9:00 service). This rite of initiation is the beginning of a new life of grace and forgiveness, in which we pray that they will have inquiring and discerning hearts and the gift of joy and wonder in all of God's works.

It also teaches us that each of us have been given a set of gifts by the Spirit, gifts we are to use for the building up of God's church and the transformation of the world with God's love and grace. That means that we are not to hide those gifts under a basket, but to share them with a needy world.

Bennett Sims, the former Bishop of Atlanta, writing in his book *Servanthood: Leadership for the Third Millennium* says this: "The first and foremost attribute of the servant church is its daring openness to the Spirit." It is the prayer that the Church makes room for the release of the Spirit in the life of the community and the courage to act when it does. We are not fall back into being the safe and self-absorbed church, but rather a place of outrageous hope and extravagant

hospitality.

On a personal level, I also think that this day reminds each of us that God walks with us in our journey of faith, even on those days when we might get discouraged and feel we have nothing to offer. God has both the knowledge and resources that we don't have. But in sharing them freely with us, God makes it possible for us to do what we cannot do alone.

We are living in a strange time, in which there is great distrust of anyone in authority" in business, in government and in the church. Corporate models are clearly not transparent, and the church needs to be careful not to follow models which are not healthy or life-giving. Church leaders need to be formed not by the last gimmicks or the bottom line, but by the study of scripture, prayer and the careful discernment of God's will. For our bottom line has never been the profit margin, but rather the care of souls of the faithful, and the care of the poor, the sick and the needy of the world.

Living a spirit-filled life, does not depend upon a person's intelligence or the ability to master skillful strategies in order to become number one. The Christian life, begun in our baptism, depends totally upon God and our receptivity to God's Holy Spirit working within us. God chose a young virgin named Mary to bear God's son, and Jesus chose a bunch of Galilean fishermen to share in his ministry. God chooses you to bear his message of hope and promise and love in this place and in our world this day.

May God empower and renew our faith this day as we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit on this Pentecost.

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