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## Homily

***In the Name of the God of Creation who loves us all, Amen.*** Good morning, and welcome to the Cathedral on this Pentecost Sunday, and on a weekend during which we celebrate and give thanks for those who have served our country. Some of these have given, as Lincoln said, the "last full measure of devotion" in that service. We remember in gratitude all those who have preserved the freedoms we enjoy. And, we give thanks for those baptized this day, and for the movement of the Holy Spirit that brought them to us. I especially want to extend our warm and heartfelt greetings to those family and friends gathered today for Holy Baptism. This is a joyous occasion indeed, and we are grateful that you are among us for this festive and spirit-filled event!

Today brings to a close the Easter season, and the Feast of the Pentecost is the liturgical marker of Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit among us. It was, after all, the occasion of his Baptism on which he received the Holy Spirit, a Spirit that henceforth informed every action of his earthly ministry. On the Day of Pentecost, the power of the Spirit was given to the community of faith—the disciples, wherever they might be gathered—to remain with them for all time.

As we heard read so well in today's passage from Acts, the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, as it was known among Greek speaking Jews. This festival occurred fifty days after Passover, and was originally an agricultural festival in which the first harvests of the season were offered. Over time it became an opportunity to commemorate the giving of the Laws to Moses at Sinai as well, so this festival day was significant indeed. On this particular day, ten days after the Ascension of Christ, the disciples were no doubt scared, and sad—grieving the loss of their risen Lord, who had gone away. I imagine that they were still uncertain as to the true nature of the events swirling around them. I wasn't there of course, but in my imagination I hear them saying one to another, "***Where do we go from here?***" On some level, they must have felt abandoned, and wondered, "***What do we do now?***" Like most of us, I know what it is like to be in search of meaning, and purpose, and to be afraid. I suspect we all know how this feels. And we sometimes ask ourselves, "What do I do now, where do I go from here?"

In a sense, this is what Abraham Lincoln was asking in his first Inaugural Address, himself feeling afraid, and his nation on the brink of Civil War, and to which he provided his own answer: ***Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.***

This is such a lovely passage, written during a difficult time in the history of our country, and begs the question, what exactly did he mean by the better angels of our nature, and how might this be related to the gift of the Holy Spirit? In a real sense, the Day of Pentecost is the final, answering verse in the tone poem that is the Paschal Mystery—the process of transformation by which we are given new life, new spirit, and a new way of looking at the lives we lead. And it is fitting that Pentecost brings us full circle in the liturgical cycle of Lent, Holy Week, and Eastertide. But what does this mean, really? I want to suggest that it involves our grieving what is past and what has died or needs to die, followed by a period of waiting and hoping, then claiming and living into our new births, and finally accepting the spirit of the life that we are in fact already living. We see this process writ large in our liturgical year, especially in the cycle of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter, and Pentecost. The disciples went through each of these stages, and on the day of Pentecost so long ago, we are told that "a sound like the rush of a violent wind, filled the entire house where they were sitting. All of them filled with the Holy Spirit."

Now we know that one interpretation of the Holy Spirit is that this is the one who comforts us. I find it fascinating that the root of the word "orphan" in its Latin form means "one without comfort." So, in precisely this sense, the Holy Spirit is one who comes to comfort us, and serves as an Advocate for God, who has adopted all of us in the Spirit of Baptism. As Augustine said, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. In other words, until our restless hearts are finally at home in and with God, we are orphans, among those without true comfort, without a home. That house where the disciples were gathered on the Feast Day of Pentecost was in this sense an orphanage, into which the wind of the Spirit blew, and they were filled with the Spirit and adopted by that Spirit and in this way, they, and we and the whole church, were transformed. I invite you to picture a time and place in which you felt at home, and safe, and where you experienced, perhaps even despite loss and grief, a sense of the peace of God. And, I invite you to consider with me the implications for our lives of relationships like this.

Recently I was listening to Tom and Ray Magliozzi, better known as Click and Clack the Tappet Brothers, whose Peabody Award winning show "Car Talk" can be heard on NPR every Saturday morning. One of my favorite parts of this show, which I listen to most Saturday mornings, is the weekly Puzzler, typically a question to which I do not know the answer, but which is always entertaining and educational. Last week the weekly puzzler question was this: ***Last summer I was driving east to west across the country, and found myself in Kansas around noon. I was surrounded on all sides by farms raising a single crop—beautiful to look at, but difficult to understand. When I looked to my right, I saw fields of yellow, and when I looked to my left, I saw fields of green, and yet a single crop was being grown. Please explain.*** And, here's the answer, which I suspect most in this crowd already know: ***In the northern hemisphere, the summer sun is in the southern sky. What I was observing was heliotropism—the tendency for flowers to turn and face the sun. The plants on the left side of me were turned away from me and facing the sun, while the plants on the right side were facing me, and the sun. The plants were sunflowers. When I looked to the right, I saw the yellow faces of the flowers, and when I looked to the left, I saw the green backs of the flowers.***

This is wonderful, I found myself thinking, and it perfectly describes how the work of the Holy Spirit, our comforter and advocate, gently guides us in the direction of God's sustaining, nourishing, and healing presence. Imagine a kind of "heliotropism of the soul" in relation to God, and one begins to understand how we are transformed when we turn toward God, with the help of the Spirit, no matter what the context may be. And now, we can actually see the human forms of this through advances in relational neurobiology. Diane Ackerman, writing in a New York Times editorial, suggests that what we are learning is that the brain is constantly rewiring itself based on daily life, just as the sunflowers in Kansas are constantly turning toward the sun. For example, did you know that if you are in a committed relationship, holding your partner's hand is enough to subdue blood pressure, ease stress, improve mental health, and even lessen pain? "In the end," Ackerman writes, "what we pay the most attention to defines us. How you choose to spend the irreplaceable hours of your life literally transforms you." A baby's first attachments imprint its brain, but this is not the end of it by any means. This neural alchemy continues throughout our lives. Supportive relationships, neuroscience is teaching us, across the life-cycle, are the most robust predictors of medical and mental health, happiness, and even forms of wisdom. In short, loving relationships can alter our brains. This includes our loving relationship with God. We now know that spiritual practices such as mindfulness meditation and centering prayer can change our neural pathways and neurochemistry, and that acts of compassion inform who, and whose, we become.

Ackerman tells the story of her own marriage. After her 74 year-old husband suffered a left-hemisphere stroke that wiped out a lifetime of language all he could utter was "Mem." "Mourning the loss of our duet of decades," she writes, "I began exploring new ways to communicate, through caring gestures, pantomime, facial expressions, humor, play, empathy, and tons of affection—the brains epitome of a safe attachment." This helped rewire her husband's brain to a startling degree, she reported, and in time they were able to talk again, he returned to writing books, and even his vision improved. The brain changes with experience throughout our lives, and it's in the context of loving relationships of all kinds—partners, spouses, children, parents, close friends, parishioners, and yes, dear one's the Holy Spirit leading us, turning us, to God—that brain and body really thrive.

So, there it is. We can respond to the Disciples' questions, which are after all ours too—"where do we go, what do we do now?" by turning to one another in love. If you're in a committed, loving relationship to another—including a relationship with God—this can change your life. What we bear witness to in Baptism, and in the Eucharist, is a commitment to this community and to that love, God's love, which binds us together. We can turn, like sunflowers in a Kansas field, and face

the source of love, and compassion, and our best selves. "Practice Resurrection," the poet Wendell Berry wrote, and that may begin with reaching out in hospitality and love, to others. And that's how the "better angels of our nature" come to us, become part of us, sustain and transform us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, throughout the long green season of Pentecost, and beyond. Amen.

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