

Pentecost: Completion of Easter Season, Birthday of Our Church.

Reflection for Pentecost

In our *Church Year* or Liturgical Calendar, the two main seasons are the *Advent-Christmas Season* and the *Lenten-Easter Season*. Today, we complete our celebration of the *Fifty Days* Easter with the *Feast of Pentecost*, (a word which means fifty).

Pentecost celebrates the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit to his people. In last Sunday's first reading Jesus said to his disciples:

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

Earlier in the same reading, Jesus said to his disciples:

John baptized you with water, I will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus ascended to his Father, the disciples returned to the Upper Room to pray and await the coming of the Spirit.

Today's first reading is a fulfillment of Jesus' promise to baptize or immerse his disciples with the Holy Spirit. Luke uses images of "wind" and "tongues of fire" to describe an indescribable experience. The image of a "strong driving wind", would have recalled for devout Jews the event in which a whirlwind of wind swept Elijah from the earth. The image of "fire" may have reminded the disciples of how God appeared to Moses in a blazing bush. Isaiah tells us God came "in fire, his chariots like the whirlwind, to gather all the nations to see his coming". (66:15)

On Pentecost Day, Jesus literally 'lit a fire' under his fear-filled disciples and blew a stormy wind into their veins. As a result, these fear-filled disciples were transformed and now fearlessly proclaimed the Good News. They were so free of fear that they were willing to go to jail and be beaten up rather than deny Jesus.

The Spirit as a Wild Goose.

In the scriptures, the Spirit is imaged as a fire, wind, a gentle breeze and as a dove etc. While all these are attractive and great images of the Spirit, Fr. Bill Bausch, in his book *"A World of Stories"*, tells us that in ancient Celtic tradition, the Holy Spirit was not represented as a dove, peaceful and pure but as a *wild goose!* Geese, says Bausch, are not controllable; they make a lot of noise with their honking and have a habit of biting those who try to contain them. They fly faster in a flock than on their own and they make excellent "guard dogs." Building on the wild goose image of the Spirit, Patricia Sanchez writes:

Like the wild goose, the uncontainable Spirit of God demands a hearing. Its song is not always sweet and calming but, is often strong, challenging and unnerving. The wild goose of Pentecost corrals people together and demands that they support and travel with one another. Those, upon whom this wild goose rests, are thereby often compelled to become noisy, passionate and courageous guardians of the gospel. Forget the quiet cooing of the dove. Pentecost's spirit honks, commanding that we be attentive to the needs of the poor. "Honk!" shouts the Spirit of Pentecost when justice is denied, when dignity is damaged, when rights are deprived, when sin goes unchecked, when life is not preserved and respected. "Honk!" sounds the Spirit, demanding that the good news of Jesus' saving death and glorious resurrection is proclaimed to all without discrimination and without stinting. It was this same fiery, forceful, windy, honking Spirit that transformed the first disciples of Jesus and directed all their ministerial efforts. It was this same Spirit that enabled all, who heard them preach that day, to understand in their own language the marvels that God has accomplished.

As careful readers of Acts will remember, the "wild goose" of Pentecost was present at every juncture of the early church's development. For example, the Spirit gave the impetus that first thrust the followers of Jesus into the mission

fields (1:8, 2:33). That same Spirit enlightened and enlarged the parochial attitude of Jews toward gentiles (10-11; 13:2, 4). Once gentiles had been admitted to church membership, it was the Spirit who helped to relieve them of the added burdens of Jewish cult and customs (15:28). When the body of believers in Jesus grew beyond the borders of Judea and Samaria and when leadership for the evolving church was needed, it was the Spirit who directed the community's choice of competent, worthy leaders (20:28).

A Spirit Who Endows Us with Gifts.

In our second reading today, Paul reminds us that "*to each individual a manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of the community.*" Elsewhere, in his writings, Paul tells us that each community is blessed with a variety of gifts.

The gifts of the Spirit are primarily given to us so that we might bless the communities to which we belong. A fully alive parish is one in which *every* member is aware of his or her giftedness and is sharing it to bless others. A fully alive parish would have evangelists, prophets, teachers, musicians, healers, song-leaders, leaders of prayer, ministers of hospitality, servants of the poor, administrators, comedians, artists, preachers, you name it. Each parish and wider community is blessed to the extent that those baptized in the Spirit of Jesus are alive using their gifts to bless others. Today, at all the Masses, we blessed all those who bless our community with their gifts of time and talent. We should also pray for the many others who are sitting on Spirit-given gifts that are *not* being used to bless the communities we live in. Sometimes, a Pastor's role is described as one who *calls forth* the gifts of the community and *orchestrates* them to bless others. A tall order, but one that I and every Pastor must constantly strive to achieve.