

Cycle B

PENTECOST SUNDAY

MAY 20, 2018

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11

Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

The Gospel of John 20:19-23

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We have been on a journey through time the last 3 months. First, we had the season of Lent which was our period devoted to penance, fast and sacrifice in honor of Jesus 40 days in the desert. We celebrated the end of that 40 days with the passion of Jesus Christ culminating in His resurrection on Easter Sunday. The following 40 days after Easter concluded last week with the feast of the Ascension of Jesus into heaven where he took His seat at the right hand of His father. During those 40 days Jesus was at times appearing to the apostles. He was telling them what he wanted them to do. They were to go and make disciples of all nations, to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, proclaim the Gospel and to obey all that Jesus commanded. He told them that He would always be with them. And finally today, after 10 more days, we conclude the 3 month journey with today's Feast of Pentecost. It is a joyful feast so the clergy wear red vestments.

The apostles have been in fear for much of this whole journey. Peter denied Him in Jerusalem. The others hid. After Jesus was crucified, and then rose from the dead, they were terrified and stayed in hiding. Jesus had just endured the most painful death imaginable. They were associated with Him. They did not want to suffer, be persecuted or die. They, and just a few others, know he is resurrected from the dead. The rest of the public thinks His body has been stolen from the tomb. During the times Jesus is with them they are comforted, but confused, by His words. That all changes after Jesus ascends into heaven. Suddenly they are alone despite all of Jesus' reassurances that He would be with them always. Their stress and anxiety reach new, even scarier, levels than before.

Now place yourselves in a similar situation. Life changing events happen to all of us. Some are happy- a graduation, marriage, baby, career choices etc. We are often in control of happy events. Those events may create some uncertainty within us. We do not

know what the future holds but we begin it through our choice. I still remember my wedding day (39 years ago yesterday) watching Sarah walk down the aisle flanked by her mom and dad. I was nervous but not uncertain, scared of the unknown but anxious to go forward with her.

It is the events that we are not in control of- the ones we cannot anticipate- that cause us high levels of stress- or more correctly distress. Those are usually unhappy events. It could be the unexpected death of a loved one, the loss of a job, the breakup of a relationship etc. They are memorable. How many of you can remember exactly where you were, and what you were doing, on Sept. 11, 2001? I can. The horrible, scared feeling I had that day will lessen but never go away. We were glued to the TV that morning as the twin towers fell and New York City reeled from this vicious, unprecedented attack. The mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani, was quoted as saying that he could never have envisioned a day when

New York City would have to be protected by armed F-18 fighter jets flying overhead. It was an act that terrified not just our whole nation but most of the whole world. Many other countries adopted a slogan that day “we are all New Yorkers”.

What was our reaction? People here, and around the world, flocked to places of worship that day. They were looking for comfort from God. At my former parish three additional Masses were immediately scheduled for that day. They were all packed. Houses of worship stayed open all night, and days thereafter, as we struggled to adapt to what has since been called “the new reality.” We felt alone, lost. Our lives had been turned upside down. We did not know how we would recover from such a feeling of despair. I will venture that is just how the apostles felt when Jesus left them. They felt a loneliness combined with a fear of the unknown future. Jesus presence was no longer there to guide them. They did not understand His assurances that He would be with them always even if they could not see Him.

We did not understand what could have motivated the Sept. 11 attackers so we turned to God, not so much for an explanation, but for comfort and solace. We are encouraged to do just that in St. Matthew's gospel. The second Beatitude says *"Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted"* and in chpt. 11 verse 28 *"Come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest."* We did turn to God and He did comfort us. It is the vicious, unforeseen attacks, like the Boston marathon bombings or the London subway attacks which strike us at our core. They hurt make us question our humanity.

Now let's go back to where the apostles are gathered. They are still alone, still terrified and still hiding out in fear unable to go forward. Jesus has been gone 10 days. In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles we learn what happened to them today- The Feast of Pentecost- and how it changed their lives and

influenced ours. Pentecost is originally a Jewish feast held 50 days after the Passover. It celebrates when the Jewish people were given the Torah and became a nation committed to serving God. The Torah is the law given to Moses and recorded in the first five books of Hebrew scripture. The apostles were Jewish. They would still celebrate this feast even though they were believers in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Today's reading from Acts of the Apostles tells us that as they were all together *"...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 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."* I suggest that it is not a coincidence that, on the day when the Jewish people celebrate committing themselves to be a nation to serve God, Jesus Christ completed

His promise to the apostles by sending them the spirit thus fulfilling that He would be with them always. He is not with them as Jesus Christ the second person of the Holy Trinity. He is with them as the Holy Spirit the third person of the Holy Trinity. He did not abandon them. They are now infused with the Holy Spirit. They are no longer afraid and confused. They go forth speaking in many languages of many different nations, or tribes. They follow the instructions Jesus gave them throughout His three year public ministry. They are going forth baptizing people of all nations in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and making them disciples of Christ. The result is our Catholic faith and other Christian faiths. Jesus Christ, and the apostles, were revolutionaries. They believed in a cause and they proclaimed it. Many believers were persecuted, not just by unbelievers, but by those who were afraid of the fervor of the believers. Many believers gave, and sadly today in some world areas still give, their lives because of their belief, strengthened through the Holy Spirit, in Jesus Christ.



Let us now fast forward to current times. Now it is our turn to go forth and spread the good news. In the sacrament of Baptism the celebrant says to the baptized, parents and Godparents what Jesus told His disciples “Go out and teach all nations...” and the celebrant continues “...by the power of the Holy Spirit...be cleansed from sin...” During the anointing of the baptized the celebrant says “...new life through water and the Holy Spirit.” In the sacrament of confirmation the celebrant says “...the gift of the Holy Spirit which you are to receive will be a spiritual sign and make you more like Christ...” At the anointing the celebrant says to each confirmande “be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Most of us have been baptized and many have been confirmed. That means that we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have received a new life, spiritual, through the Holy Spirit. We are now more Christ like. We believe this. We remind ourselves of this belief every Sunday at Mass. We pray in the Nicene Creed “I

***believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the father and son...***” The Holy Spirit has been sent to inspire, guide and protect us. The Catechism says that “...the Holy Spirit is the first to awaken faith in us and to communicate the new life to us...” By the Holy Spirit coming to us at Baptism, and then sealing us at confirmation, we receive His gifts. Those are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and filling us with the spirit of the fear of the Lord. We have these gifts in us.

On Holy Thursday I asked you “Ask not what your God can do for you but what you can do for your God?” We can, and should, use the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our everyday lives. They influence every aspect of our lives in what we do for ourselves and others. If we use them the way God intends then we will be the ones going forth and making disciples of all nations. That is not a responsibility given only to Priests, deacons or religious. It is a responsibility given to all of us

by God by the sending to us of the Holy Spirit. He told us that He will be with us *“...always, until the end of the earth”*.

Do we use the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the way we handle the happy, and unhappy, events that occur in our daily lives? Do we turn to God at those times? If we use the gifts as God intended by sending the Holy Spirit to us then we will be the face of Christ to all. That will make disciples of all men. Maybe just one at a time but one is better than none. We read in Acts today that after the Holy Spirit came the apostles went out speaking in the languages of many nations. Languages the apostles previously did not know. The crowds gathered in Jerusalem said to each other “...yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.” It was an act of God, through the Holy Spirit, that gave the apostles the ability to speak those languages. We have the benefit of belief in God and the Holy Spirit, and the knowledge of the gifts we have been given, in our going forth today. May Almighty God Bless you.