

Sunday May 23, 2021

Pentecost Sunday Parishioner Reflection

By: Paul Legace

On this Pentecost Sunday we celebrate the birth of the Christian Church. The Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples as tongues of fire, emboldens them and allows them to speak numerous languages to spread the Good News of Jesus to the ends of the earth. St. Paul writes to an early Christian community and tells them the Holy Spirit is at work in those who have faith in Jesus. In John's Gospel the disciples witness the Risen Jesus. He brings them peace and the power to forgive sins. Pentecost can be reborn in each one of us if we take the time to allow the Spirit to speak to us and give us the gifts to transform our lives and those around us.

In the first reading from Acts 2.1-11 the Holy Spirit enters the house where the disciples have hidden from the authorities and transforms their lives. A violent wind enters the room and separate tongues of fire rest above each disciple. They are filled with the Holy Spirit and have been given the gift of speaking a new language. They leave the confines of the room with confidence and begin speaking about Jesus to many devout Jews from the various regions surrounding the Mediterranean. All are amazed at these Galileans. We must remember the context of this magnificent event. Many of Jesus' apostles and disciples were visited by the Risen Christ in the days and weeks following the resurrection. They have been transformed by meeting the Risen Christ. If they doubted as to who their master and teacher was they doubted no longer. Some of the disciples were present again when Jesus appeared in their midst and spoke about how they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. They were to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Afterwards Jesus ascends to heaven and disappears from their sight. This is the context for the disciples who are in Jerusalem for the Jewish spring harvest festival called Shavuot. They are also gathered here because Jesus told them to stay in Jerusalem until the Spirit appears to them. The appearance of the Holy Spirit breathes new life into these once fearful disciples and they preach the Good News to all who will listen. Many Jews from the distant regions heard about Jesus for the first time and become followers. Here we have the birth of the Church. Nancy Clemmons in *Exploring the Religions of Our World* expresses this event in a succinct manner by exclaiming God makes a new covenant through Jesus Christ. In this covenant the Church became the New Israel. Jerusalem becomes the first centre of Christianity and missionaries are sent out to all the known regions of the world to spread the news about Jesus Christ. One can imagine the

enthusiasm and deep convictions of these first missionaries. Is it any wonder Christianity spread so quickly. Here indeed is a birthday worth celebrating!

In the second reading taken from (1Corinthians 12. 3b-7, 12-13) St. Paul writes boldly to the Christian community in Corinth. Paul tells them straight up have faith and the Holy Spirit will work through you. St. Paul describes the movement of the Spirit in a creative manner. There are a variety of gifts but the same Spirit. There are varieties of services but the same Lord, and lastly there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates them in everyone. How can I use my gifts to make our world a better place for everyone? A number of us have the gift of languages and can teach these languages to young and old alike. Learning a new language helps one to appreciate the diversity of the human family and build tolerance. Others may have the gift of a skilled trade, whether it is carpentry, electrical, or mechanical to name just a few. If one were to volunteer a few hours to Habitat for Humanity or another similar charity, these skills could lift a family out of poverty. Another gift could be that of a scientific mind. How many scientists have worked countless hours over the last year to create a vaccine to lift humanity out of the lethal grip of the present pandemic?

When one puts her/his mind to it we can be of service to our communities in many ways. A nurturing parent helps a young child with her homework or a challenging teenager with a moral dilemma. A personal support worker cares for the needs of the elderly in his care and respects their dignity regardless of their affliction. A police officer strives to protect those in the community she serves. She respects their rights no matter what their race or sexual orientation. A coach volunteers his/her time to coach their daughter's soccer team. He strives to coach more than just physical skills but life lessons such as sportsmanship, fair play and a sense of community. The Spirit stirs us to action by encouraging us to give of our time, talents and financial resources to make our world a kinder, gentler place for all of God's creations.

In John's Gospel (John 20.19-23) we're taken back to the evening of the first day when Jesus had risen from the dead. The disciples are in Jerusalem in the room with the doors locked in fear of the Jewish authorities. Jesus appears to them and exclaims "Peace be with you." He shows them his hands that have been pierced with nails and his side that was pierced by a spear. The disciples are over joyed with meeting Christ again. Jesus tells them He will send them as the Father has sent Him. He breathes on them and says receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives them the power to forgive and retain sins, essentially ushering in the sacrament of reconciliation. Every year fifty days after Easter we celebrate Pentecost. Our Church in many ways is reborn or reinvigorated with the Spirit.

Do we take the time to listen and allow the Spirit to speak to us? This can be challenging in a world with constant noise pollution. We need to be still and quietly listen. Are we open to the gifts of the Spirit, some of which are patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control? In our present world there are many who are overwhelmed with the upheaval the pandemic has caused. There hasn't been one aspect of our lives that hasn't felt the impact of COVID-19. Frustration, hopelessness, anger, sorrow, ambivalence these are some of the emotions we may have experienced or are experiencing presently. We look about for quick solutions and there are none. What we need most presently is hope and a vaccine. The latter is available to all of us in time. We need to be grateful to the scientists who've worked tirelessly to create one. Where do we find the hope to carry on through what seems an endless cycle of openings and lockdowns? The gifts of the Holy Spirit can provide us with the inner peace that the Lord has not abandoned us, and we can endure. There has never been a better time to allow the Holy Spirit to be reborn within us. What we need more than ever is patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control. Prayer is an avenue to speak, listen and understand what the Lord asks of us.

Faith requires action. Perhaps the following suggestions can be of help to you. Donating money to relief organizations especially the Red Cross or to the Archdiocese of Toronto through Development and Peace, can assist developing countries deal with the ravages of the pandemic, such as India where the need is great. Reading material from credible media and scientific sources to educate ourselves about the vaccine is an act of patience and understanding. The medical and scientific communities' responses to the pandemic are evolving and we need to be patient and keep things in perspective. Our scientists have come an incredibly long way in a year from dealing with an unknown virus, to developing a vaccine, to responding to these new variants. It is quite reasonable that our medical professionals' advice will change the more they understand about this elusive virus.

Getting vaccinated would be another act of kindness to yourself, your loved ones and your fellow citizens especially those who are older and those with compromised immune systems. Calling a friend, sending an email, or writing a letter are other kind gestures to help a friend. A word of encouragement that this pandemic will end and we will once again be able to socialize and celebrate can help one struggling with the isolation. A gentle and selfless act is what is required. Supporting your local businesses such as restaurants can help them financially and emotionally. Letting them know that citizens care about them and their future is a thoughtful act during a very stressful time for their industry.

A simple act of kindness is all it takes. There are countless other ways to allow the Spirit to renew your faith. On this Pentecost Sunday may we be open to the Word, the sacraments and all the gifts the Spirit offers us so we can begin anew.