

Homily for May 23, 2021  
Pentecost Sunday

*Waiting in the Upper Room*

The Upper Room is the most frequently mentioned space during the Easter Season. The Triduum on Holy Thursday begins in the Upper Room as the Lord institutes the Eucharist and teaches the Apostles the material that comprises John 13-16 – what is commonly called the Last Supper Discourse”. In John 17, Jesus prays the high priestly prayer in the Upper Room as he prepares to ascend the altar of the Cross. In the Upper Room on Easter Sunday Jesus appears to the apostles, and as we heard from today’s Gospel and commissions them to carry on the mission that had been entrusted to him by the Father: “As the Father has sent me, so now I am sending you”.

Yes, in the Upper Room the apostles had been troubled because of what Jesus was telling them about his impending Passion. They left that first Eucharist disturbed and confused about Judas. Why had he left, what was it the Lord had directed him “to do quickly”? Then they became so fearful in the Garden that when the guards arrested Jesus they scattered, Peter denied Jesus, and on Easter evening, they were behind locked doors in the Upper Room because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. The events of the world had so pressed in on them over that weekend they felt isolated, confused and wondered what would happen next.

The Upper Room was the place where some of the deepest anguish was experienced by these friends of Jesus. The Upper Room is a fitting setting to think of what we have experienced in the past 15 months. COVID has so affected us that we too are behind locked doors because of the fear of transmission. Our children and young adults have had an experience of school and university unparalleled by any earlier generation. In school, on-line school, distracted learning. Trying to learn and teach, work, socialize, interact in a virtual world where our screens allow us to be connected to each other, sort of. But like the masks we wear when in proximity of each other, they screen us and create distance between us as well.

So while we sit in this upper room, 15 of us gathered here and those participating via the Live Stream we experience a whole range of emotions – from distraction, to boredom, restlessness, isolation, fatigue, optimism, hope and many more.

It is also in the Upper Room 50 Days after Easter Sunday we also find the Apostles on the Feast of Pentecost. Here are gathered not just the 12 Apostles, but in total 120, with Mary at the centre of the Church as the original congregation waits for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Waiting.....

Aren’t we a waiting people? Waiting to hear the news when vaccination numbers will be such that we can begin to gather again – so that grandparents can hug their grandchildren and have they come for sleepovers. Waiting to celebrate that wedding that has been deferred because of COVID. Waiting for the time when we can gather with friends for a dinner party, celebrate a birthday. Sit leisurely in a restaurant, have a funeral reception, go to a football game, picnic in the park... Waiting for that day when you can turn off the computer and come to Mass. Waiting

to unlock the doors to the Church, put away the mass attendance sheets and say to people, please sit wherever you want to.

Waiting for the Corona Virus to be behind us.

And while this waiting is at the forefront of our thoughts and feelings these days, Pentecost proclaims to us there is something else we are waiting for. Actually it is someone else. He is the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit. For while the vaccine will help bring the virus to an end – it is the Holy Spirit for whom we wait to enfold us into the community of the faithful; and equip us for mission in our post COVID society.

Think about those gathered in the Upper Room. The Lord is no longer present in person, but Mary is. And just as she had been there to nurture and form the Son of God – the literal body of Jesus, now with the Church, she will extend to it the same maternal care she had shown to her beloved Son. Remember Mary is the one for whom the Holy Spirit is her spouse. She had experienced the Holy Spirit coming upon her 34 years earlier and lived her life in daily relationship to the Holy Spirit. Now in the Upper Room she welcomes the Holy Spirit again with those gathered under her maternal care. However it would not be the Word Made Flesh in the person of Jesus but the Word Made Flesh as the Holy Spirit was infused within those on whom the tongues of fire fell.

To be embraced by the Holy Spirit is to freely declare that Jesus Christ is the Lord and to know that we too have an integral part to play within the community of the Church. We belong and are essential to the Body of Christ. St Paul put it like this in our reading from 1 Corinthians:

***Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.<sup>1</sup>***

Listen to how St. Paul pairs words with each person of the Trinity.

- Gifts are paired with the Holy Spirit
- Services with Jesus
- Activities with the Father

To be enfolded into the Church allows us to discover that the Holy Spirit imparts to each of us gifts. These gifts are to be used in the service of the Church and the World and are joined to Jesus the person of the Trinity who said “I came not to be served but to serve”. The activities speak to the multiplicity of ways in which people share in the life of the community gathered together with Mary. These activities are associated with God the Father, who as the creator of heaven and earth is always at work, actively sustaining all life.

The Holy Spirit enfolds us in His Love because he is equipping us for Mission. In the Acts the Missionary calling of the Church is expressed by the community that was proclaiming the gospel

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#). (1989). (1 Co 12:4–6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

in the languages of the world. This is a beautiful thing. The Holy Spirit made it possible for the early Church to be understood by those who are witnessing the miracle of Pentecost. Think about it this way. From the Upper Room the 120 would go out into the world never having done before what they would now be doing. Making the story of Jesus intelligible and inviting others to be enfolded into this community of faith-filled love.

It is the same thing that Holy Spirit is equipping us for today. We do not know what it will be like post COVID for the Church. But what we can know is the Holy Spirit will equip us so we can communicate the story of Jesus' in ways that help people experience real and not virtual community where together we can gather in the Upper Room represented by this Altar and know that our waiting is not just for the end to COVID but to a more spirit-formed encounter with Jesus in His Church.

May we allow Mary to extend her maternal care live Pentecost in the months ahead as a people not just waiting for the end of COVID but also as an expectant people waiting for the Holy Spirit to enfold and equip to go from the Upper Room into the world as Jesus' friends and descendants who were joined together on Pentecost.