

## **Homily for the Feast of Pentecost - Year B**

### **St. Peter's 11:30/5:00 Sunday Masses - May 19, 2024**

**Acts 1: 1-11** "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit to speak in other languages."

**Psalm 104:1-8** "Lord, send forth your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth."

**1 Corinthians 12:3-13** "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

**John 20:19-23** "Jesus came among them and said, 'Peace be with you', then breathed on them."

### **The Spirit That is Fire**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *The Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world and that which contains all things understands what is said, alleluia.*

**Collect:** *O God, who by the mystery of today's great feast sanctify your whole Church in every people and nation, pour out the gifts of the Holy Spirit across the face of the earth and, with divine grace, fill now once more the hearts of believers.*

### **Introduction**

Today, we celebrate that event which takes us back to the beginning of the period of the Church, the Body of Christ, at Pentecost.

In the creeds we recite at mass, we end with declaring our belief in that Church when we say: "I believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Well known faith teacher, Bishop Robert Barron, tells the story of when, as a young priest, he was training Altar Servers. One of the things they had to do was memorize the Apostle's Creed. One of the boys came to the last part, declaring: "I believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apple Cider Church."

### **1 Corinthians**

But today we have in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading pretty much the most simple and easy to remember creed of all. In fact, I believe none of us here today should leave without memorizing it. The whole of that creed is this: "Jesus is Lord." This creed distinguishes Christians from non Christians. If you can affirm that Jesus is divine and is our God and king, like he said about himself, then

we are in the very heart of Christianity. But there is a strange twist. Paul tells the Corinthians that they can't really do that - declare that Jesus is Lord - and really mean it without being inspired by that fire which is the Holy Spirit. Remember when Jesus asked them: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus told him essentially, you did not come up with that insight on your own. It came from God.

That's God, the Holy Spirit. What is the Holy Spirit? We need to have some idea today especially, since this day is the primary celebration of the Holy Spirit, which is active all the time, but we pay attention to it today. This is the same as the fact that during Easter, we pay special attention to the resurrection, but every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection. Mass is meaningless without it.

The Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son. We are united to that love by the Holy Spirit. We see in the world that unity is about being on one side, one ideology, or the other, and that you must swear to uphold worldly ideas. But the Christian is united by believing in, and upholding, and making visible, the God who is perfect love. When people go with worldly unity, it means adopting whatever is the fashionable ideas of the time. But we believe that there is a truth and goodness and holiness which are for all time and all places. We are made to be what God has made us for. This is what it means to believe and declare that Jesus is Lord.

### **Gospel of John**

Before his death and resurrection, one of the ways Jesus identified the Holy Spirit is the Advocate. In court, the Advocate is the one who defends us when we are accused. Young Paddy was in court and, after an eight hour trial he pleads guilty. The judge says to him: Why didn't you plead guilty in the first place and save the court all that time?" Paddy says: "I thought I was innocent until I heard all the evidence against me." Satan has piled up

evidence against us, like he did against Jesus, and wants us to believe we are guilty but without any possibility of repentance or forgiveness or mercy.

After the resurrection, the doors were locked because they were terrified. Of what? That they would be convicted of the same crime as Jesus, of believing that God had come to his people in the flesh. They were terrified that they would be killed too. That's natural I guess. But as great a fear I think was that they were alone. We might feel some of that fear because we are without a pastor right now. They needed reminding as we do, that with the Holy Spirit, which is the love between the Father and the Son, which we see most clearly in Jesus himself, is with us in power and glory. You and I may be anxious or afraid about many things. But this is our day to say we know that the Holy Spirit is present.

Jesus entered the room where those terrified disciples were hiding. He breathed on them. The word for spirit in both Hebrew and Greek is the same word that also means breath. So Jesus gave his Apostles this gift by breathing on them. This is the breath of God that was present at the first creation of all things, which now is creating something new. But this time he is making it so that we must invite and be open to receiving that breath into our lives.

Jesus is breathing on us right now in this place. You are not alone. Let that breath of God enter your hearts and souls and minds, into all the places where you are anxious or afraid. God has not abandoned us. He is here with us at this very moment. We can say 'Jesus is Lord' only if we do that. Jesus is Lord of my life, of my possessions, of my relationships, of my occupation. Jesus is my lover and my Saviour. Because he alone can fill our restless hearts, we each find in his will the secret of our peace and joy. Jesus does not just give us our peace. Jesus is our peace.

## **Acts of the Apostles**

Now we come to this telling of what happened on that first Pentecost. It says that tongues of fire came to rest on each one of them. Speaking as the Spirit enable them to proclaim.

But why did the fire at Pentecost take the shape of tongues? And why did it appear on their heads? Because it gave the Apostles the power to speak, not their own minds but the mind of God, and not with their own tongues but with language that they had never learned from human being but from God.

In pagan Greek mythology, Prometheus stole heavenly fire to give it to humans. Zeus was so angry at this act of charity to man that he chained Prometheus to a rock. In Christianity, however, God is not made of jealousy but of love, and he himself gives us the fire from heaven, the Holy Spirit, who is the very life of God himself.

Remember John the Baptist telling his disciples that, while he was baptizing with water, one would come after him who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. This is a fire that does not destroy. It is the fire that Moses saw at the burning bush in the desert, that was on fire but not consumed. This same fire is available to us, so that we can be on fire but not consumed. This fire is the Holy Spirit, the very love between the Father and the Son.

Pentecost's miracle reverses the babble of the Tower of Babel. Pentecost reversed that confusion of languages and restored unity to humanity, as a foretaste of heaven. Pentecost was not about proudly trying to rise from the earth to heaven, like the Tower of Babel, but humbly descending from heaven to earth, like Christ himself.

At Pentecost, God gave himself away to mankind a second time. He had given mankind his Son. Now he gave us his Spirit. That life which comes down from heaven is not dead like ashes after a fire, but glorious and alive like a fire that cannot be put out. And, unlike forest fires which threaten

peoples' homes and cities, this one only makes those people and places alive with the fire of love.

### **Call To Conversion**

There is the famous painting of Jesus standing outside a door holding a lantern. Then one notices in the painting that there is no door handle on the outside. Jesus is standing there and knocking but we have to open the door from the inside to let him into our home, which is our hearts. But the passage from 1 Corinthians today tells us that we can really only do this, we can really only be inspired to do this, if we have the Holy Spirit encouraging us to let Jesus the Lord come into our hearts and minds and souls.

Christ came through their locked doors and he also comes through ours. The Holy Spirit is sweeter than any apple cider; stronger than any fire, just waiting to take our lives out of the ashes and make them living testaments to our claim that "Jesus is Lord." Let us go forth with this creed and this knowledge. Pentecost blessings on all who hear this.