

Homily for Pentecost Vigil Mass
June 8, 2019
By Deacon Nick Thompson

In this evening's Gospel John points out, "There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." On this, the vigil of Pentecost, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Mother Church, the coming of the Holy Spirit, it seems appropriate that we explore the spirit of the word vigilance and the role vigilance plays in the birth of hope and faith. In modern psychology, vigilance, also termed sustained concentration, is defined as the ability to maintain alert watchfulness over prolonged periods of time. During this time, the individual watches or listens for a signal that may occur at an unknown time. Vigilance implies waiting, waiting in hopeful anticipation for an event that is almost but not yet. The Book of Hebrews 11:1 ties all these things together when it states, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith then is confidence or assurance that one will receive what one vigilantly hopes for. Consider a third grader, they think they passed, but until they see the report card that says "promoted to the 4th grade" their stomach is upset, they groan within themselves and learn to hope. Much the same as an expectant mother, who awaits the birth of her baby. Will the baby be normal, ten fingers, ten toes? For nine months, sometimes less, sometimes more,

two hearts beat as one and a mother learns to hope, until labor pains begin and with inexpressible groanings a new soul, a new heart takes its place in creation and God's endless love for mankind is again manifested in new life. The mothers first words, "How is the baby?"

When our children are newborns their means of communication is limited. Still they are able to wake us when it is time to be fed or changed or they are afraid or insecure or lonely. They cry out or whine or scream or laugh and even in some cases they get too quiet. Moms and dads, who love them, quickly learn baby language. They become living baby monitors, restlessly sleeping with one ear open. Regardless of the time of day or night, parents come to check on the helpless infant and attempt to fulfill their every need. Good and loving parents are vigilant and learn to hope for a time when they will be free from 2:00AM feedings and dirty diapers. Fortunately, God provides parent and baby a universal language common to the human species: care, concern, consolation, honesty, integrity, openness, understanding, patience, tears, hugs, prayer, all these and more, the universal language of love in action as defined by God Himself. Through this means we come to learn faith through our hopes being vigilantly fulfilled.

In the case of parents, their vigilance as regards their children's communication skills remains constant well into the teenage years and sometimes beyond. There is an attentiveness to hear their first word:

Will it be mamma or daddy? There is an eager alertness to hear the first sentence, a careful observance when we detect the first attitude, a cautiousness when they begin to talk back, a wariness when we clearly hear a bad word and guardedness when communication seems to cease. Unfortunately, the time comes when our children grow up and long for independence. Often, they want to wipe the slate clean, discarding everything they have been taught, morals, faith, prayer and even family. It seems we as parents no longer speak the same language as our children. Confusion, that is Babel takes over, it is then we must rely with hope on the universal language common to the human species: care, concern, consolation, honesty, integrity, openness, understanding, patience, tears, hugs, prayer, all these and more, the universal language of love in action as defined by God. As parents we have faith and hope that these actions vigilantly practiced will overcome the language barriers that have arisen and reestablish communication with our loved ones.

Genesis takes us back to a time when the descendants of the sons of Noah began to “fill the earth.” God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has vigilantly observed His petulant children since their creation, since the fall of Adam, since the remnant survived the flood, since the death of His only Son. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He is attentive and watchful for our well-being. He has noted the hardness of our heart.

He alertly recognizes the confusion growing in the minds of His children. Soon his children will take such pride in their own achievements that they will no longer feel a need for their creator for he who continuously makes their existence possible, for he of whom the psalmist speaks, "Creatures all look to you to give them food in due time. When you give it to them, they gather it; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. If you take away their breath, they perish and turn to dust." Our loving Father who created us in his image and likeness who gifted us with intellect and free will, who made us capable of love understands perfectly our confusion, our lack of understanding, our groaning within ourselves as we strive to hope for what we do not see.

He relies on the universal language common to the human species: care, concern, consolation, honesty, integrity, openness, understanding, patience, tears, hugs, prayer, all these and more, the universal language of love in action as defined by Himself. He gives us the Holy Spirit a piece of himself to dwell within us and teach us how to love. These loving actions like rivers of living water flow from within we who believe in him. They build and strengthen our faith, our confidence, our assuredness that because we vigilantly follow the universal language of love, we will one day receive what we hope for. And so, we as parents, who were once children ourselves, call out to the one who searches hearts, "Aid our weakness and teach us to hope as we ought."