

It has been fifty days since we celebrated the resurrection of our Lord on Easter Sunday and so now we come to the end of the Easter Season; now we come to this great feast of Pentecost. The reading from the Acts of the Apostles described what happened at that first Pentecost. To me this has always been one of the most vivid passages in all of Scripture. Even since I was a child, I have not been able to hear this account of Pentecost without imagining what it was like. There, in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, were gathered Mary, the mother of Jesus and His Apostles and some other disciples.

And why were they there? They were following the Lord's instructions, they were praying for the gift of the Holy Spirit that He had promised to send them. As it turned out, they were making the first novena - spending nine days in prayer for a particular intention.

And as the tenth day arrived since the Lord had ascended into heaven, their prayer was answered.

And 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 one 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.

What a vivid image! It so easily comes to life in our imagination. A strong wind filling the room. Tongues of fire descending on each of them. A miraculous gift enabling them to speak in other languages to proclaim the Good News. What an incredible event to experience! The power of the Holy Spirit, the power of God Himself coming down to earth!

And the people in Jerusalem were astounded and amazed. They could see and hear the power of God. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is a power that blows where He wills. Because the Holy Spirit is a power that burns with love. Because the Holy Spirit is a power that proclaims the joy and the peace and the truth of God. This is the power that the Apostles and the disciples received. This is the power that the people in Jerusalem experienced. And what was the result of this power of the Holy Spirit? Acts of the Apostles goes on to tell us that 3,000 people were baptized that day. The power of God and the testimony of the Apostles transformed them and filled them with faith and so they gave their lives to the Lord!

Yesterday, was a very special day here in our parish. As we celebrated the Vigil of Pentecost at 4 o'clock Mass, Archbishop Aymond, a successor to the Apostles, joined us and he bestowed the sacrament of confirmation on 7 members of our parish - 4 of our young adults in high school and 3 adults who had not yet received confirmation. As part of their profession of faith, the archbishop asked the candidates:

“Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who came upon the apostles at Pentecost and today is given to you sacramentally in confirmation?” He reminded them that the Holy Spirit who came down upon Mary and the disciples at Pentecost is the same Holy Spirit that they were about to receive in Confirmation. Yesterday, we experienced a new Pentecost right here in our Church.

And for us who have been confirmed, we have received this same Holy Spirit, too. We have been filled with that same power. The same wind has blown upon us; the same tongues of fire have descended upon our heads. We are filled with the same courage and zeal to proclaim the Good News to all the world.

Yet, for most of us, confirmation was something that happened once, many years ago. Perhaps over time, it may seem that the power has faded, that the wind has died down, that the flame has dwindled. But the gift of the Holy Spirit does not fade unless we allow it to. We are the spiritual descendants of those men and women who were in the Upper Room nearly 2,000 years ago. Through confirmation, we have been filled with the same Spirit as them - the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father. And our mission is the same as theirs - to testify to the truth. Like the Apostles we have been sent out to proclaim the Good News of a God who loves us, who became one like us, who dies for us and who is risen from the dead!

Now this is not an easy mission - to proclaim the Good News to the world - especially in a world that seems to reject the Gospel, that seems everyday to move further and further from the Lord. But Jesus never promised us that it would be easy; He never promised that proclaiming the Gospel would be comfortable or even safe. Remember, almost all of the Apostles were put to death because of their preaching. But, Jesus did promise that His Spirit would remain with us; He did promise that His Spirit would fill us with the gifts and even the words that we need to proclaim the Good News. That is the promise. Now it is for us to trust in that promise. Now it is for us to step out in faith and proclaim the Good News.

How do we do that in our lives? Maybe it is by not backing away from conversations about faith or religion, but in charity standing up for what we believe and sharing the joy that our faith brings. Maybe we can offer to pray for or even to pray with someone who is suffering in some way. Maybe it is simply the smile or the kind word shared with someone that might lead them to ask us about the source of our joy. What is most important is that we draw near to the Holy Spirit so that we can receive His gifts and so that we can have the courage to be a witness to God's love for us and His desire to save us.

The power of the Holy Spirit is alive in each one of us. On this Pentecost, let us pray that His power may be stirred up in our souls. May the gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit continue to fill us with love, with joy, with zeal, with courage so that we may proclaim to the world that Jesus Christ is Lord!