

Pentecost 2016
7AM Mass Homily
The Holy Spirit: Real, Relevant and Ever Present
Deacon John Ashmore

In today's first reading and gospel, we hear two different versions of the Pentecost story. In the first reading, a loud wind fills the apostle's house and, "tongues as of fire" descend upon them, empowering them to speak in languages that were previously unknown to them. In the gospel, Jesus appears to the apostles in the locked upper room the day after the Resurrection. Twice he said, "Peace be with you." That should tell us just how much Jesus wants all of us to live in his peace. Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them." In the first reading the power of the Holy Spirit appeared in "tongues as of fire"; in the gospel the power and presence of the Holy Spirit was transmitted in the very breath of Jesus upon his apostles. That's reminiscent of the creation story from Genesis when God formed man out of dust and "blew into his nostrils the breath of life." Those are very different images, but taken together they point to the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in our world. The power of the Holy Spirit is real, relevant and ever present.

Last week I served at the Confirmation mass at the cathedral when several of our young people were confirmed. It was a moving rite, and as I watched each of them being sealed in the Holy Spirit, as they were anointed with Sacred Chrism by Bishop Barber, I couldn't help but wonder what the Holy Spirit moments in their lifetimes might be. Will they feel the power of the Holy Spirit when they prayerfully decide on what career or course of study to pursue? Will peace, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, come upon them when they meet the person whom God intends for them to marry? Will they know the Holy Spirit's gift of understanding when they are challenged by the loss of a parent or another loved one? My prayer for each of them and all of us is that we will know the peace of the Lord and the presence of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our lives. And this is possible provided that we pray faithfully and constantly to the Holy Spirit for those other gifts that were poured out on all of us when we were confirmed, the gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord.

I believe that in each of our lifetimes, we will all have what I call special "Holy Spirit Moments." While we have opportunities to commune with the Holy Spirit every

day, there are some really vivid moments when each of us will experience him in our lives uniquely. These are moments that can't be explained in human terms, and non-believers scoff when we try to share our experience with them. These special encounters are life changing. I want to share one of my special Holy Spirit moments with you this morning.

Almost exactly 22 and ½ years ago, I was on my way home from a routine business trip to Michigan. On my layover in Chicago, I called Julie, who was then 5 ½ months pregnant, to see how things were going and tell her my ETA. She said she wasn't feeling well and thought she was having some contractions. It seemed that our pretty normal pregnancy might be turning in a direction that wasn't normal after all. Julie had already called her parents, and they were driving down from their home in Vacaville to be with her, in case she needed to go to the hospital before I got home.

Four hours later when I landed in Oakland, I immediately called home from my car phone, and there was no answer. I called Julie's parents, and again there was no answer. I called the hospital, and they said they hadn't admitted her. I was frantic as I drove to Kaiser in Walnut Creek, thinking that she had to be there. When I arrived, ER said she hadn't been admitted. Maternity told me the same thing, so I went back to my car and called the home phone and the in laws again. Still no answer. As I walked across the courtyard of the hospital, I suddenly saw my stepson and my father in law in the distance and ran to greet them. My father in law pointed to where Julie's room was, but before I got to Julie my mother in law said, "John, you need to know this: Julie's going to lose the baby." Then I heard a voice and repeated quietly what the voice said: "No, she's not." Where did the voice come from? I instinctively knew that the voice I heard was the Holy Spirit speaking to me. A sense of peace came over me and I knew everything would be okay. I worried, but I wasn't fearful about the outcome. Four days later, on November 18, 1993, our son Matthew David was born, weighing only 1 pound 13 ½ ounces. He was 12" long from head to toe. Just to give you a sense of perspective about how small Matt was, I want to show you a picture. Do you see that bracelet that he's wearing on his arm? That's my wedding ring. Yup, he was tiny.

Matt had a way to go from that first morning. Julie and I spent hours every day with him in the hospital, praying over him, singing to him and telling him our hopes for

his life. He didn't come home from the hospital until three months after he was born, but before we knew it a year had passed and then two and then many more. There were some rough patches along the way, but he weathered his storms by the grace of God. Matt will be 23 in November. He is 6'3" and now he makes a living caring for young people and adults with developmental disabilities. He may not admit it, but the Holy Spirit is still with him!

Did Pentecost happen the day after Christ's Resurrection, or did it happen several weeks later? Was there a wind and tongues of fire, or did the risen Jesus give them the Holy Spirit by breathing on them? I don't know, and no one can say for sure. But one thing is certain to me: the Holy Spirit is real! The Holy Spirit loves us in union with the Father and the Son. He is here to help us every day, but he is with us in a special way when life seems to go out of control. All we need to do is reach out and ask for his intercession. The Holy Spirit will do more than just point the way to us: He will empower us to live lives of faith, and he will guide us to the path that leads us to our heavenly Father. On this Pentecost Sunday, let us pray that we will always be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and that he will always be with each of us in a special, powerful way.

