

HOMILY PENTECOST SUNDAY - YEAR A (Homily 02)

“Pentecost and Tee Pee Spirituality”

(Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104; 1 Cor 12:3-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23)

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A certain person was troubled by nightmares. He went to see a psychiatrist and shared with him that sometimes he dreamed he was a tee pee and sometimes he dreamed he was a wigwam, so what was his problem? The doctor told him it was simple, he was just two tents!

Putting up a tee pee begins with three poles. A structure needs three poles to be secure and stand on its own.

The readings for this feast of Pentecost Sunday present us with tee pee spirituality, three poles necessary to live as Spirit-filled followers of Jesus: community, forgiveness and service.

The first reading from the Acts of the Apostles is all about community, or being church. It is a description of the Pentecost event that for St. Luke takes place 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus, one week after the Ascension. Mary and the disciples are gathered together in prayerful hope, following the instructions of Jesus to wait for the coming of the Spirit.

That gathering is an image of the Church. The Hebrew word for church, *qahal*, means the people called out, a gathering. The Greek word for church, *ecclesia*, has the same meaning. That is where the French word for church, *eglise*, comes from. So to be the church, to be initiated into the church, is to gather together in the Spirit.

For St. Luke, that Spirit comes upon the apostles in the form of a strong wind and tongues of fire. The little group is transformed by the Spirit into the Church, the Body of Jesus. Filled with courage, they burst out of their confines and a double miracle happens: first, they speak in other languages, and second, others understand them in their own language. There is a tremendous unity that reverses the confusion of languages at Babel in the Old Testament. To be Church, then, is to gather together, to overcome divisions, to strive for unity, to be of one mind and heart, to become one in the Spirit. This event is the birthday of the Church. We recall the words of Jesus, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them.” How important it is for us to gather together in worship on Sunday, the day Jesus rose from the dead, even if there is no priest. We gather around the Word

of God to be Church.

The second pole of our tee pee spirituality is forgiveness. In the Gospel of John, we have a different account of the Pentecost event, because John wants to stress a different reality. He is so eager to share this Good News with us that he places the giving of the Spirit on the first day of the week, the evening of the same day that Jesus rose from the dead. For John, this momentous event is tantamount to a new creation, surpassing the first creation.

Again, the disciples are gathered together, waiting in faith and hope, an image of Church. Jesus comes through locked doors imparting peace. What is happening is that the disciples, who had betrayed, denied and abandoned Jesus, were experiencing his forgiveness. After all that failure on their part, and all the abuse that Jesus had experienced, there was not a trace of anger or resentment in him – only forgiveness.

He then showed them his hands and side. Jesus did not fight back, nor did he run away from his pain. Instead, on the cross, he forgave those who were crucifying him. He dealt with his pain through forgiveness. And now he was forgiving his disciples. The new life that Jesus wants to give us, the life of the church, the new language that the church is to speak, is the language of forgiveness.

Not only that, Jesus then breathes on them the Holy Spirit, making this a Pentecost event. He empowers them to forgive, as he has forgiven them. So much so that whenever they forgive someone, the reign of God is advanced here on earth, and whenever they do not forgive someone, that reign of God here on earth is held back. What spiritual power Jesus has given to us, the Church! The second pole of our tee pee, then, is forgiveness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We now turn to the second reading and the third pole of our tee pee, service. St. Paul proclaims that the manifestation of the spirit is given to each one for the common good. We are to give our gifts and talents away. We are to give our lives away. It is by serving others, our brothers and sisters and all in need, that we will find fulfillment, peace and joy in our lives. Every baptized person, everyone initiated into the Body of Christ, is to have a mission, a ministry, a way of serving others. We need to identify our mission, and do it. Winston Churchill once said, “We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give away.” He had it right.

Violet was given in marriage at the age of 14 to a much older man, by her grandparents who were raising her. In the end they never did get married. This man

was very abusive, and after bearing six children she had to leave him for her own safety. After another failed relationship, she met a priest who invited her to get involved with the church. She did, and was transformed. She took the Christopher Leadership course, participated in a Cursillo, and completed one year of a Lay Formation program. She fell in love with scripture and became familiar with Matthew chapter 18 where Jesus teaches us how to forgive by sharing our feelings of hurt instead of reacting in anger or running away into addictions.

One day her ex-partner verbally abused her terribly. With the advice of her pastor, she practiced her newly acquired spiritual skills. She wrote a letter to her abusive ex-partner, communicating her feelings with love. Then she delivered the letter to him in another community with her daughter. When he read it and did not react in anger, her daughter exclaimed “Mom” for she had never seen her parents relate in this way – it was always a fight before.

Violet returned to the city on a spiritual high. Her pastor pointed out to her that she was living the gospel of Mark where Jesus tells his disciples to baptize all nations and teach them his commandments, which is to love one another and love our enemies. The signs that would accompany them would be that they would pick up deadly snakes and not be hurt, drink deadly poison and not be harmed, speak a new language and heal the sick.

The pastor pointed out to Violet that in writing her letter that way, she picked up a deadly snake and it did not hurt her. By delivering that letter, she drank deadly poison and it did not harm her. By expressing her hurt with love and forgiveness, she was speaking a new language that her daughter noticed. And she was healing the relationship between her ex-partner, her daughter and her. When he died of cancer some years later, of all his family, it was Violet who cared for him until the end. She was truly a disciple who had learned to “be church,” had learned the language of forgiveness, and served others well.

The *Returning To Our Roots* process that we have begun in our archdiocese of Keewatin-The Pas is an attempt to return to that spirit-filled enthusiasm of the early Church through prayer, scripture, the Eucharist and community or really being church.

The Eucharist that we now celebrate is in a sense a Pentecost experience for us today. Jesus comes into our lives through his Word and especially the reception of his Body and Blood. We are thus forgiven, healed and empowered to go out and serve one another as he came to serve all humanity.

So as we celebrate this feast of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, let us strive to live a tee pee spirituality of community, forgiveness and service.