

HOMILY PENTECOST YEAR B – Homily 02

“Live in the Spirit”

(Acts 2:1-11; Gal 5:16-25; Jn 15:26-27; 16:12-15)

A French Canadian preacher was asked the secret of his success. His reply was simple: “First, I tell them what I’m going to tell them, then I tell them, then I tell them what I told them.”

In a similar way, all the readings for this feast of Pentecost focus our attention on the Holy Spirit – the gift of the Spirit; who the Spirit is and the work of the Spirit. The readings combine to impart one strong message, expressed by St. Paul – to live in the Spirit.

The first reading describes the momentous giving of the Spirit at Pentecost. What is striking about this event is that the reception of the Spirit is described in terms of speaking and listening. On the one hand, it appears that the tongues of flames that hovered over the disciples and filled them with the Spirit of Jesus, granted them the ability to speak foreign languages. On the other hand, it is also possible that what happened is that all those who heard them were given the gift of understanding in their own language what was spoken to them.

Either way, the miraculous gift of the Spirit at Pentecost involved the reality of communication. Something of the divine was being communicated to mere human beings. The fact that the crowd witnessing this event represented the known world around the Mediterranean basin at that time meant that the Easter event experienced by the disciples now was meant for the whole world, for all of our wounded and divided humanity.

The very deliberate inclusion of sentences such as “evening of the same day that Jesus rose from the dead” and “the first day of the week” by the author indicates that this is a new creation, something entirely new breaking into the history of the world. I believe that this new creation is of greater importance and significance than the first creation of the universe, awesome as that is. How privileged we are to be part of this new creation.

The gospel for today takes us a little deeper into who the Spirit is. The Spirit is called an advocate. An advocate is someone who pleads our cause, who presents our case, who takes our side, who defends us, who goes to bat for us. But this is no ordinary advocate. This advocate is also God, the third person of the Holy Trinity. Jesus is clear that all that the Father possesses has been given to him, and that the Spirit takes what was given to him by the Father and gives it to us.

It is as if the Holy Spirit is a divine transmitter of the power of God which is far beyond our ability to absorb. We know from scripture that to see God face to face is impossible and would be far too overwhelming for us, much like we cannot gaze at the sun without

protective eyewear. So God's love and gifts are made to measure for us by Jesus and his Spirit.

A question that we could ask ourselves is how we have allowed the Spirit to work through and in us? In a scene in Paul Claudel's play *The Humiliated Father*, a Jewish girl, beautiful but blind, alluding to the double meaning of light, asks her Christian friend: "You who see, what use have you made of the light?"

St. Paul, in the second reading, goes on to describe the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in us, heals and purifies us, guides and transforms us. The Spirit helps us to finally let go of sin and sinfulness in our lives, as they are listed there. It is noteworthy for our sex-saturated society of today that the first two sins mentioned are fornication, which is genital sex outside of marriage, and impurity. The Spirit has much work to do in our society!

God does not just remove these negative things from our lives, however. The easiest and best way to get the air out of a glass is to fill it with water. And that is how the Father of Jesus Christ heals us. Jesus pours the gifts of the Spirit into us, filling us with those gifts and pushing out the negative reality of sin and sinfulness. And what beautiful gifts they are – peace, joy, and all the rest that are named.

Ultimately, what is happening is that we are being established within the reign of God here on earth. That is why St. Paul encourages us over and over again to live in the Spirit, to be guided by the Holy Spirit. It is a Spirit-driven way of life, the best of all lives.

A group of tourists were visiting a huge cathedral. A little girl in the group stopped, in contemplative silence, to look at the beautiful huge stained glass windows. The afternoon sun was shining brightly, bathing the group in a splendid symphony of gorgeous colors. After some time, as the group was about to leave, the little girl asked the guide, "Who are those persons in those beautiful windows?" The guide told her that they were the saints. That evening, as the little girl prepared for bed, she told her mom that she knew who the saints were. "Well, who are they?" her mother wanted to know. "Saints are persons who let the light shine through them!" was her innocent reply.

The Eucharist that we celebrate on this feast of Pentecost is itself a spirit-filled event. The Spirit speaks to us through the Word of God, shares with us God's forgiveness, and above all, transforms humble gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

That would be incomplete, however, if we do not let ourselves be transformed by the Spirit into the Body of Christ, sent out in the world to live in the Spirit and to spread the Good News that the Spirit of the Risen Lord is waiting to transform all of reality into a new creation.