

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
Feast of Pentecost
June 5, 2022**

SCRIPTURES:

Acts 2:1-11	The community is filled with the Holy Spirit.
1 Corinthians 12:3-7,12-13	The Spirit creates a new body of Christ
John 20:19-23	Jesus comes to those who fear, bringing peace.
Psalms 104:1,24,29-31,34	God's Spirit has all power

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

John:

In the Gospel of John, there is no separate Pentecost event; it is always tied in with the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. He breathes on them and gives them his Spirit. Again, Jesus identifies himself as the Crucified One. If they can identify with him in his suffering, then they will receive power for the works of the resurrection. The Church, which is the body of Christ, is sent to do the works of the living Christ. The Church can have no other mission than to heal and to forgive, to reconcile those who have been alienated. This empowerment for forgiveness cannot be interpreted narrowly; overcome all the effects of sin in the world.

When Jesus appears after the resurrection in John's Gospel, he comes to fulfill the promises he made at the Last Supper. He had said he would return, and he does. He had said there would be peace and joy at his coming. That is the gift that he bestows on his disciples.

For the community of John, that part of the early Church that has given us this Gospel, the Three Letters, and perhaps also the Book of Revelation, Jesus is not absent from their midst. He said he would abide with them in power. And he does. The Spirit is the presence and the power of Jesus at work in their lives and in the life of the community. This is where their energy comes from; this is the source of their ministry and their confidence. The community of John is a high energy community, filled as it is with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Church today needs to re-appropriate this sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit within it so that it will be aware of the energy available to it for its mission in the world. We cannot sit back in powerlessness and hopelessness. Christ is not absent and far from our reach. His Spirit fills the hearts of those who have heard the Gospel and have come to believe. There is nothing we cannot do with the energy that is already within us.

It is no accident that Jesus refers to the power to forgive sins, which he has just imparted to the disciples when he breathed the Spirit upon them. The forgiveness of sin, reconciling all of creation with the Father, is the primary work of salvation. Thus, does Jesus renew the original creation that has become corrupt through sin. The whole purpose for his coming into the world is fulfilled when sins are forgiven. Do we want a practical expression of what the mission of Jesus is all about? Reconciliation of the world with God. Do we want a practical expression of what the mission of the Church is all about? The forgiveness of sins. At first reading, it sounds rather abrupt that Jesus goes right into the forgiveness of sins after he has given the Holy Spirit. But, what else is the Spirit given for?

The mission of the Church is summed up very nicely in this short passage, so short that we sometimes miss most of its meaning and its impact. “Go out now and forgive in my name” says the Lord. “And you will be doing the work which I have come to inaugurate. It is now your task and your mission to bring reconciliation to the world so much in need of it.” Pope Francis has traveled to many countries to bring peace and love. So must we.

Acts:

Pentecost is a Greek word meaning “fifty days.” It refers to the Feast of Weeks which is celebrated by Jews 50 days after Passover. It is a feast of thanksgiving for the spring harvest of wheat. During the Feast of Weeks, the Jews remember and renew their commitment to the covenant. They belong to God and God belongs to them. Faithfulness is called for. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the community of believers reverses the confusion of Babel. Whereas sin has led to a multiplication of unknown tongues, now God brings human beings back together so they can hear the many tongues as one, in holiness and grace. Wind and fire are always signs of God’s work, especially associated with the covenant.

Corinthians:

The Church of Corinth was as divided as the Church is today. Debates raged as to the priority of certain gifts from God in the life of the believer. Paul points out that the gifts are complementary and meant for the common good. The gift does not give stature to the one who has received it. Rather, it gives a responsibility to share the gift with others. It is designed for the good of the Church. The variety of gifts points only to the generosity of God. God wants all those gifts unified for the proper functioning of the body of believers. Baptism and Eucharist create the unity that will bind all gifts into one body for the glory of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Even after Peter had denied knowing Jesus just a few days earlier, Jesus comes now with words of “peace” and “forgiveness” for him and for all. How do we feel when Jesus forgives us after we have sinned?

2. How is it that forgiveness of sins, one for another, becomes a sign of the kingdom of God? How effective is that sign today? Suggest ways in which the Church today might exercise the ministry of forgiveness more effectively. Do you have a sense that the Church is essentially a forgiving Church? How might this image be polished up somewhat?

3. In what ways can Pentecost be said to be a “new creation?” Discuss how the spirit of God hovered over the waters and brought forth the first creation in the Book of Genesis. Discuss how the Spirit overshadowed the Virgin Mary and she brought forth the new life of God’s Son on earth. What new things are being brought about by the action of the Holy Spirit in the world today?

PRAYER

**This day, the Father of light
has enlightened the minds of the disciples
by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
May he bless us and give us the gifts of the Spirit forever.**

**May that fire which hovered
over the disciples
as tongues of flame
burn out all evil from our hearts
and make them glow with pure light.**

**May God strengthen our faith
and fulfill our hope to see him face to face. Amen.**

(Adapted from the Blessing Over the People)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Church becomes the living body of Christ and is empowered to do the works of Christ in the world. The whole Church, the gathering of all its members, great and small, clergy and laity, is sent by God to continue the saving work of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit came upon Mary at Nazareth, and she conceived the Son of God in her womb. The Holy Spirit comes upon the assembly of disciples in the upper room and they become the body of Christ in that time and place. Through the ages, the Spirit is bestowed on every new generation so that the body of Christ might be present and at work in that generation.

The mission of the Church is therefore identical with the mission of Christ: to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom, to call people to repentance and to faith, to offer praise and thanksgiving to the heavenly Father, to guide all people in the ways of the Gospel. The power of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the Church community, makes it possible for the Church to fulfill its mission.

The Church must always pray for faithfulness to its mission. Opening its heart to the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church itself is purified of its unfaithfulness and strengthened in grace for the works of the kingdom. Every parish, every family in the parish, every grouping of the faithful, will only become effective ministers of the Christian vocation when they are continually being made holy by the power of God in the Holy Spirit.

When the Church celebrates the sacrament of confirmation for the initiation of new members, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the "Gift." The Spirit is God's gift to the assembly of Jesus' disciples. Just as Jesus was Gift to the world sent for our salvation, now his Spirit is Gift to the Church so that this body of believers might be truly alive with the life of the Risen Christ.

The Gift of God is a living person, the fullness of God the Father and God the Son. "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and there shall be a new creation. And you shall renew the face of the earth."

(See: **The Catechism: #733-741**)

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