

Homily
May 28, 2023
Pentecost Sunday
27:55-36:29

Pentecost. Fifty Days. Fifty days since we celebrated the Resurrection. For us, that has its meaning, but for our Jewish ancestors, Pentecost was first their feast. It was a feast of the Spring Harvest. They came to Jerusalem bringing some of the first fruits as a sacrifice to the Lord and to give praise to God for caring for them in such a fashion.

Today, in Judaism it is not so much a harvest feast, as it is a feast they call Shavuot. It's the fifty days. And on this fiftieth day, they remember the giving of the Covenant on Sinai, connected so much to the wandering in the desert. And we find it mentioned in Deuteronomy, Numbers and Leviticus. So thrice repeated in description, it must be very important to them.

Our readings for us give us images – images of the Spirit that have ancient biblical roots. The first is that driving wind. It recalls Genesis. The wind over the waters. It recalls the power of the wind, especially in rending rocks and in scudding clouds in the heavens.

It clearly reminds us of the water of life, which the Lord gives. And the gift of life, the *Ruah*, that “life breath” breathed into all creation, as we sang in Psalm 104 this morning.

And of course, there's fire. That's why we wear red. Again, a reminder of the Sinai Covenant. The Covenant, the burning bush and the pillar of flame at night, to guide the people in their wanderings. Fire giving guidance and sureness of God's presence.

But there's another symbol or metaphor that gets missed sometimes. And that's noise. That noise that began to catch everyone's attention. Then when the Spirit descended upon the disciples and upon the crowd, God spoke through them. God spoke in the noise and in the hearing. Everyone heard the Lord speaking in their own language. And they made a noise of rejoicing.

God was in their presence. They could hear the Lord speak.

Now, in Western theology, we're more focused on Christology. The whole laying out from 325 to 451 of our creedal structure about Christ. Who is this Christ? What do we believe about him? Oh true – there was a development as well of the Spirit, as you will note when we proclaim the Creed today. What

is just one line in the Apostle's Creed is more than one line in the Nicene Creed. But for the most part, we Western Christians have remained focused on Christ more than the Spirit.

It's our Eastern brothers and sisters (sadly from which we are separated) who focus on the Spirit, and have for centuries. It would be good for the West and the East to share back and forth, in an ecumenical sharing, that understanding. Possibly it could bring us back to unity in the Spirit.

Our reading today from the Acts of the Apostles – the Spirit empowers the Church. It lets loose the disciples and lets loose the hearers.

In I Corinthians we hear it's not so much the Church as it is the **members** who are now touched by the Spirit with gifts. And all of those gifts, which every one of us has, is for the benefit of **all**. It is not just our gift. How we use it is for the world and for our community.

And then in the Gospel, Jesus breaths – *Ruah*, once again – on the disciples and commissions them with the forgiveness of sins. Or the withholding of that forgiveness if there is not a response.

Spirit: Empowering. Forgiving. Energizing.

You know brothers and sisters, over the centuries the Church in its wholeness has declared through councils, decrees and writings, many truths for us. And now we stand in the era of "synodality," which is another expression of the Spirit among us.

That Spirit which is for us to speak and for us to listen to each other. Bishops, priests, laity – all of us – sharing our common wisdom. To move towards being Church in a new way in the 21st Century.

And then, is it not true that the Spirit engages us in liturgy and sacrament again and again? And then it is for us to be the Church at home and to be the Church in the gifts we share. We are the Church together. There is a power in that and the truth shared by us in how we live, how we speak and very much in how we pray.

So brothers and sisters, let the Spirit fill us this day. Even as there's something else going on in this city...to the west. But let us **be** Church. Let us rejoice in the gift that we are and can be. And let the Spirit touch us today. It's a gift we've been given. May it be given away by us – not only today, but every day.