

Homily
May 19, 2024
Pentecost Sunday
23:40 – 35:38

And so we gather on this 50th day of our Easter Season, the conclusion of the celebration of the great mystery of faith: Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. Today though, we celebrate the reality of who we are and are called to be: the Church, the Ecclesia, the assembly of the faithful. And we celebrate 2000-plus years of it.

We have heard today of two accounts of the coming of the Spirit upon God's people. The first is the most familiar to us, that day on the Feast of Pentecost, in the capital of Judea, Jerusalem, the Jewish conclusion of their feast of 50 days. And upon the disciples in the Upper Room, the Spirit like a driving, strong wind and flame, not only blew the Spirit into them, but sent them forth.

They were filled with the Spirit and these people **hiding** in the Upper Room, hiding for fear, now come forth and proclaim the goodness of God. Their proclamation however, not just in Aramaic or Hebrew, is in all languages so that all might hear the wonder of this Christ.

But that's not the only effect of the Spirit. All of those people who heard and as we heard, they were from all over the world at that time. They **heard**. They were given the ability **to listen** and to take it in. And if we went further into the reading today, we would hear that some turned to the Lord immediately. They were filled with the Spirit no less than when we heard about Cornelius, just a week or so ago, and the Spirit came upon him and his household.

There's another account in the Gospel. It's John's version of the coming of the Spirit. We might call it "John's Account of Pentecost." There, Jesus enters the Upper Room and the same group of guys (as he tells it), are afraid. And he greets them with the greeting most needed, "**Peace be with you.**"

And after he repeats that, reassuring them that that's really what he wants for them, he breathes on them and offers them the Spirit. But it is not just a spirit to make them into Church – Ecclesia. It is the Spirit that is going to give them as Church the ability to do what he has done throughout his ministry, forgive sins.

What he has done, he passes on. And in the first account, what he had done living in the Spirit, proclaiming the word, he now passes that on to the Apostles, and therefore to the Church.

Yes, brothers and sisters, **mission**. We are all sent on that mission. We don't have to be an apostle. We're just disciples. Sent.

Now there's a Second Reading. (You might have noticed that.) From Galatians. Here Paul is addressing the Galatian community about the context in which they live. The culture in which they live.

Have you heard this sentence before? "Oh, the Church is supposed to be counter-cultural." Anybody heard that before? I recently read where that's probably not exactly true.

The Church, its mission is to go into the midst of the culture and proclaim the Good News, knowing full well that they, the Church, live in the midst of that culture. They are sent to bring the news of Christ into its midst. And by so doing, offer the possibility of conversion.

That's what Paul is doing in the reading from Galatians. He knows that the Greek and Roman culture in which they live is not of the Gospel. And he reminds them of the power of the flesh. That is, the power of not being in Christ, or not seeking salvation through the Spirit. But rather, to be stuck in this (our bodies).

He doesn't condemn this. That's not really what he's doing. He's not condemning our flesh. I mean, after all, where did it come from? God. Created. Given over to us as a gift. Whose Son **shared** in that gift.

No, what he's saying when he says "the flesh" -- he's talking about a culture immersed and totally caught up in desire. And you heard it so well proclaimed by Sylvia.

What does the flesh urge? It says, "immorality, impurity, lust, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies and the like."

Does that sound familiar? Is that not a description of the mainline culture in which we live? Caught up in desire and the sating of those desires?

Do we not see a struggle with morality rooted in clear teaching? Do we not see hatred, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, dissensions, factions? We sort of sum it up right now in our time as **polarization**. And do we not know of jealousy and war and drinking bouts and other addictions?

We, my brothers and sisters, are no different from the Galatians. --We because the Spirit has come upon us. The question becomes, do we accept the gift of the Spirit and let it percolate within us to counter the effects of the culture and make better choices even for ourselves.

Choices like **love** as Christ has loved. Joy, peace. What Christ offered his disciples: Patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. -- Reflecting another writing of Paul: 1 Corinthians Chapter 13. It too is the stuff of the Spirit.

That is what we are all called to try to live and to do it in such a way that when people see us loving, joyful, with some sense of peace, even in very difficult moments, being patient, kind and generous, listening well to the other. And only then responding to what we actually heard, not what we thought they said.

They see us living faithfully and gently. And being full of self-control over our desires and our passions. Can you imagine? If they see this in us, they will (say?), “How do you do that?” “How **do** you do that?” And our simple response is, “God helps me in the Spirit.” And that might just start a conversation that infiltrates the current culture.

We’re sent on mission, brothers and sisters. First to live as Christ would have us live. And as we live it, be willing to accept the questions of others. “How do you do that?” Perhaps what they see and how we respond can bring about a change of heart and a greater life in the Spirit for all.