

THE DAY OF PENTECOST (B)

Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15
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In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Perhaps you heard about the man who had been suffering with a headache for several days. Finally, he went to see a doctor. However, the office nurse looked and acted like a Marine drill sergeant and greeted him gruffly. When he told her about his headache, she barked in a loud, stern voice: *“Get into that exam room, take off your clothes, and put on this gown. The doctor will be there in a few minutes.”*

The man protested, *“But ma’am, surely I don’t need to go through all of that. I just have this chronic headache.”*

To which the nurse answered, *“Sir, did you hear what I said? You get into that exam room, and put on this gown right now!”*

And so the man did. When he got into the room and closed the door, he discovered another fellow, already sitting in there, wearing a gown. The man with the headache said to the other guy, *“This is ridiculous. I don’t know what in the world I’m doing in here. This is crazy. I just have a headache.”*

And the other man said, *“You think you’ve got problems. I just came in here to read the meter!”*

Now that nurse had **power**, didn’t she? She commanded, and people obeyed...out of sheer terror!

The Holy Spirit also has power — but of an entirely different kind. Not the power of brute force, or blatant intimidation. Not the power of political clout, or wealth, or weapons. But rather the power of truth and love. The power that comes from a God who loves so much, he went to the cross for you.

Pentecost is the birth of the universal mission of Christ’s Church. The apostles, were sent out by the Holy Spirit from the place where they were meeting. And pouring into the streets, they spoke to the multitude of pilgrims who were gathered in Jerusalem, from all over the known world:

*Parthians...Medes...Elamites
residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,
Pontus...Asia...Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene...
visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,
Cretans and Arabs —*

And all the people said of the apostles:

*We hear them speaking in **our own languages**.* (Acts 2:9-11)

But it wasn’t enough that all these visitors to Jerusalem simply heard in their own language. No, it was the **specific message** — **what** was spoken — which was vitally important. And what the pilgrims to Jerusalem heard the

apostles proclaim, was *not* a message about their own religious experiences. No. But rather a proclamation about “*God’s deeds of power, his mighty acts.*” And this message was made specific in St. Peter’s sermon. The bottom line of his proclamation, found later in the second chapter of Acts, was this — Peter declared:

*Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty
that God has made him both Lord and Messiah,
this Jesus whom you crucified. (v.36)*

The apostles then, were proclaiming *God’s victory in Christ* over sin, death, and the devil. And when the hearers asked the apostles how they should respond, Peter told them to:

***Repent, and be baptized** every one of you
in the name of Jesus Christ
so that your sins may be forgiven;
and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Those who are baptized, receive the Spirit. As St. Paul says, “*all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.*” We become God’s children — and brothers and sisters of Jesus — in Holy Baptism. In fact, the baptized community — the Church — becomes, in the Spirit, the *continuation of Christ’s own presence* in the world.

As St. Paul wrote in Romans and again First Corinthians, the Church is nothing less than “*the Body of Christ*” in the world. So Jesus is *not* only seated in heaven, at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, sent from God the Father, Jesus Christ is visibly and tangibly present in the world, through the Church.

This is an incarnational and sacramental understanding of the Church. As Christ first took on flesh in his birth, so now he takes on flesh anew in his Body — the Church. As Christ is the sacrament — the very physical presence — of God in the world, so now the Church is the sacrament — the very physical presence — of Christ in the world. And that makes the Church a unique people — a people unlike any other. Because she is the very presence of Jesus Christ *in* and *for*, the world.

This is what the Holy Spirit has come to bring about — the Body of Christ in the world. The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, which is *not* called to contain the good news but to *be* the good news. To *go out* into the streets — like the apostles — and *share* the good news.

Now the difficulty is, we tend to want to control the work of the Holy Spirit. We want to channel his power. *We* like to be in charge. We want the Holy Spirit to be manifested when and where, *we* desire. Frequently, that means it is easy for us to slip into some kind of prescription for churchly or congregational “success.”

And there are plenty of religious consultants, who are only too eager to sell

you their latest and greatest prescription for success: “Read this book. Follow this program. Utilize this strategy. And your then congregation will ‘grow.’ Do this. Do that. And then your church will ‘thrive.’”

All too often, these instructions on how to “grow” the Church have very little to do with the cross of Jesus Christ. Instead they are based on business models, and their goal is institutional survival. Too frequently they are simple marketing models, with humanity at the center, rather than the crucified and risen Jesus Christ at the center.

These efforts to control and direct the Holy Spirit usually ask questions like, “*How can we — the Church — be relevant to outsiders?*” or “*How can we convince the world that the church is helpful and important, or that it still matters today?*”

In contrast to that kind of thinking, the scriptures bear witness that the ***Holy Spirit drives the Church*** to invite those outside to see how they can be relevant to the story of Jesus.

The ***Holy Spirit drives the Church*** to be more fully what she already is — the crucified and risen Body of Christ.

The ***Holy Spirit drives the Church*** to be what God has created her to be — a community formed by the Triune God in the waters of Baptism.

The ***Holy Spirit drives the Church*** to be a community which gathers *not* for entertainment, but for worship.

The ***Holy Spirit drives the Church*** to be a community which is gathered *not* to receive self-help advice, or a psychological pep talk, but to praise and glorify God.

The ***Holy Spirit drives the Church*** to be a community centered *not* on meeting the *felt*-needs of the marketplace, but a community centered on the faithful proclamation of God’s Word, and the faithful celebration and administration of the Sacraments.

The ***Holy Spirit drives the Church*** to be a fellowship which confesses and bears witness that *this is reality* — right here — this gathering for worship is what is *most real* — and all the rest of life flows from it, and reflects it.

This Holy Spirit-driven gathering, joins us here on earth to what is happening eternally in heaven — ***worship*** and ***communion*** with the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Spirit works faith when and where he wills. And we cannot control or manipulate that work. We can only seek to be faithful servants and instruments of that work.

Indeed, we are to simply ***be faithful***, in season and out.

Toward that end, we pray: “Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.”

In the name of the Father, and of the ✝ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen