

Pentecost Sunday

(Acts 2:1-11 / John 15:26-27; 16:12-15)

23.05.2021

We read in the account of the Pentecost event in the Acts of the Apostles: *When Pentecost day came round, the apostles had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech.*

What is drawn to our attention here is how when the Spirit came upon the Twelve, and the other disciples gathered with them, they were united in one place, together in one room and all of them were of one heart. It is drawn to our attention furthermore that their senses were awakened to the Lord's coming to be present to them in the new way that He had foretold and promised before His Passion and death (cf. today's Gospel passage).

The Spirit came not only to be with the disciples, in their midst, but to take up residence, to make His home, in each one's heart: that's to say, in the very depths of each one's being.

As I said, the disciples senses were awakened to the Spirit's coming. *They heard the roaring of the wind.* They *heard*. Their hearing, their sense of sound, was awakened. We are also told that *something appeared to them that looked like tongues of fire.* They *saw* these flames. Their sense of sight was awakened at that moment. And finally, *they began to speak.* A gift of new speech was given to them. We should note especially what is said of their speech, because the text develops this theme. They spoke not just as they had done before. In the power of the Spirit, they now spoke in a new way, communicating in foreign languages. We could say that the Spirit's gift of speech led the disciples out of themselves; it led them beyond their frontiers; it brought them far beyond their own little restricted world. It had them interact with people who were very different to themselves; people who came from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We heard various peoples named in the text. Later on in the Acts of the Apostles we will see that the disciples were led by the Spirit to go to the places from which these various peoples originated to meet them on their home territory. As the Apostles went to those different places they were led on occasion to interact with people who were of a completely different faith background to their own. What is also remarkable in the text read this morning is that *everyone who heard the disciples speak understood them.* The diversity of people gathered in Jerusalem listened to the group of unlearned Galilean fishermen speaking in ways that were comprehensible to all. People from a wide range of nations heard the apostles preach – *each one heard the Apostles in their own language, proclaiming the marvels of God.* It is as if a world which had been thrown into confusion and chaos at Babel (cf. Genesis 11) is led by the Pentecost event to enter into a way of reconciliation, through restored understanding and meaningful communication. Dialogue between different people is now rendered possible... a dialogue that is respectful of each one's distinct understanding and which takes into consideration the legitimate differences that exist between the diverse nations of the earth.

Given what we read in the few short verses heard in our first reading today – verses which recount the Pentecost event for us – we could say that there was a *Before Pentecost* and there was an *After Pentecost*. This is something that will be reinforced by a wider reading of the Acts of the Apostles and the ensuing story of the Church.

Clearly, the gift of the Spirit given on that first Pentecost day, wrought a marvellous change not only in the Twelve, but in all those who were touched by the promised gift of God which came from on high. Minds and hearts were renewed. Fresh courage and new hope were given.

People looked at each other and saw each other differently. They listened to each other in a new way. They well and truly gave each other a hearing. They came to understand each other better. As Jesus had promised before He took leave of His disciples, sadness was transformed into joy. All in all, Pentecost was experienced as nothing less than a new creation. When God sent forth His Spirit all things were recreated; the face of the earth was renewed. All the world's inhabitants were brought to new life.

Pentecost marked a new era in history as God's breath of life was breathed afresh into the weakened and faltering lungs of men, women and children. By the gift of the Spirit humanity was restored to its original glory, made to reflect God anew.

It is good for us to be reminded of the profound significance of the Pentecost event. Just as the first Pentecost was clearly a transformative experience for the disciples and for those of the other nations who were gathered in Jerusalem and witnessed its impact, so it is to be hoped that our liturgical celebration of Pentecost this year will prove to be a transformative experience for us at the particular point on life's journey where each one of us finds him or her self today. Our liturgical celebrations of the Sacred Mysteries are all meant to change our lives. Pentecost day is not meant to be just another day in the calendar year – a day that we will notch off as having endured!

A call is addressed to us this morning is to open our hearts to the new thing the Lord wants to do in the life of His Church at this period in her history. We have to hear that call as a call addressed to us in our personal lives to begin with and also in the life of the Christian community. The Lord wants to do something new in each one of our lives and in the life we are called to share together as His holy faithful people. Christ wants to see us animated by His Holy Spirit, so that we may be His witnesses in today's world... in a manner that is understandable to today's world... in a way that is credible to those who look on at how we live our lives. For this reason we need to be really attentive, truly sensitive, to those around us. What matters is not just to serve up to people what we might be inclined to think they would like to hear us say, but to share with them the Good News for which they truly long, the Good News of which they really stand in need... albeit perhaps that they do not yet have a very clear idea of just what it is they truly long for and what it is they really stand in need of. It is not just by the words we speak that we are called to bear witness – however eloquent the words we speak may be. It is, above all, by the lives we live that we are called to bear witness to Christ. We are encouraged by the Sacred Liturgy at the end of our Eucharistic celebrations to go forth into the world to proclaim the Gospel by our whole way of life. To do that demands of us that we are seen to be living in a way that is coherent with the message we proclaim. I think most of us would have to concede that as Church we have a long way to go to become more coherent with the Gospel message confided to us.

At this time in the life of the God's People a path is being proposed to us to help us become more coherent with the Gospel message that has confided to us: the Good News we have for mission to transmit in a credible way to the world around us. The Church is proposing to us the Synodal Path as a way to become more authentically what Church is meant to be: the gathering of all God's People. It is so important that we walk together and listen to each other, daring to believe that in doing so we are given to listen to and hear the Risen Lord who walks in our midst, living as He does in the hearts of each one. That is why attention to Christ in each person is so important. In the Synodal process we must seek to remain attuned to the Spirit of God who speaks in the Church.

The Synodal Way being proposed requires of us that we strive to be more sensitive and attentive to the motions of the Holy Spirit who lives in the hearts of all the Church's members.

That demands of us a great act of faith. It requires of a spirit of holy hope. It engages us to have true love for each other in our hearts, as members of the one body of Christ, the one Family of God.

We are being called to understand that the Lord is alive and active in His Church. We are being called to truly believe that the Lord speaks to the Church and in the Church when all her members come together in the Spirit of faith, hope and love, to listen with the ear of their hearts to the inspired word of God in Sacred Scripture, ready to examine the challenges and opportunities of the present day and age in its light, in order to discern the Lord's way forward which. The way the Lord desires to see us follow will be indicated to us if only we remain attuned to and in accord with what is inspired to us by God's Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit our Synodal gatherings will amount to nothing more than *Talk Shops*.

Our unity, our striving to be in communion with each other, is fundamental for us if we are to experience God's blessing as we engage in the Synodal Way. For this reason we must be extremely attentive not to listen to the bad spirit which can so easily infiltrate the Church by sowing seeds of fear and distrust in the hearts of the Faithful. Often this bad spirit will use sincere persons who are driven more by fear and distrust than by the Spirit's gifts of courage and confidence in God.

St Augustine saw the need for Christians who want to be led by the Spirit striving to be one in Christ. This led him to declare in one of his Sermons: *Would you then live by the Spirit of Christ? Then be in the body of Christ. Be one with the body of Christ.* In the same sermon St Augustine went on to say something it is important for us to hear on this Pentecost Sunday in which we implore for the Church a fresh outpouring of the Spirit. Augustine declared: *The body of Christ (the Church) cannot live but by the Spirit of Christ.*

Let us implore the gift of the Spirit of Christ for the Church today, so that her message may be heard and understood; so that we may hear and understand it; and then, in our turn, echo and proclaim it, for, as we heard in the Gospel passage read today we are called to do so. We have Jesus' word for it: *You will be My witnesses.*

The only way for us to be credible witnesses is to be connected to Christ; to be one with Him. The call to be witnesses heard in today's Gospel passage comes in part from chapter 15 of John's Gospel – the chapter entitled the *Vine Discourse*, whose whole point is that as branches of the vine we must be draw our life-energy, our sap, from the stem – that is, from Christ. The second part of the Gospel text our lectionary has put together with a kind of *cut and paste* method is from chapter 16 of the Fourth Gospel – from part of that chapter to which the following heading is given in many Bibles: *The Work of the Spirit.*

In the light of what we have read from chapters 15 and 16 of John's Gospel heard this morning, I suggest that we pray for ourselves and for each other, imploring the grace to be planted in the soil of God's grace, one with the Vine who is Christ, given to bear the fruits of the Spirit which are the most convincing testimony we can render to the power of Gospel in today's world. May we bear in abundance *the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.* If we are seen to bear these fruits then we will well and truly be Christ's witnesses. The Lord will be seen to be alive and at work within us. We will be seen *to live and move and have our being* in Him. We will glorify Christ by our lives. We will do that by leading others to encounter Him in and through their meeting with us.