

31 May 2020

Pentecost Sunday (A)
Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.

With our gradual return to our public celebration of the Eucharist at Mass, we find ourselves having to implement lots of new procedures and precautions, and thus, once again, we implore everyone's patience and cooperation. But this has also reinforced for me personally the fact that our liturgies truly are the work of the Church, the people of God gathered in any given time or place—even over distance—to worship God and be sanctified by him. Before we even begin any liturgy, the Holy Spirit draws us together, to be in communion with God and with each other. The Church is people, first and foremost. And the Spirit unites us together, our diversity in unity.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we hear about the great Pentecost event, the manifestation of the Spirit while the disciples are gathered in prayer in the upper room, together with Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Here once again we see the connection between prayer and the Holy Spirit. And even though the scene becomes quite dramatic with the disciples suddenly speaking different languages to the various peoples gathered, the point is that the Spirit enables them to communicate, to proclaim, the Good News of God to everyone. The Spirit in a sense heals their divisions.

Saint Paul was addressing this problem of division in the Corinthian community. He uses the famous image of a body with many parts:

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

One body, many parts. And a sign that the Spirit is present and working in our Church is our unity, even with the challenges that our diversity brings. And I mean diversity in the broadest sense: age, race, language, socio-economic status, political affiliation, whatever color of face mask you like to wear.

Paul says that the Spirit also bestows many gifts upon us: “different kinds of spiritual gifts”, “different forms of service”, “different workings” of the one God, one Spirit in each one of us.

When Paul says “spiritual gifts”, one could also say “charisms”. Paul's notion of “charismatic” is probably much broader than our connotation of the word today. For Paul, being charismatic doesn't just refer to those who are good with speaking or praying in public, spontaneously or extemporaneously. He means everyone who is aware of the Spirit present within them, aware of the gifts they have been given, and very importantly, who put those gifts at the service of others: *“To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit [for the community].”*

At baptism, we receive the gift of the Spirit, the very presence of God deep within us. Thus, we are called to be charismatic people, attuned, if you will, to the presence of Spirit within ourselves, within each other, and within our Church. The Spirit is the bond of love and unity between the Father and Son in that eternal communion of life and love that is the Trinity, our triune God. Thus, the Spirit is for us both the source and the motivation or impetus for our unity as a people and our unity, our communion with God.

Thus, when we pray for a greater outpouring of the Spirit in our lives or a deeper awareness of his presence, I like to say we're not really "invoking" the Spirit as much as "evoking" him. By baptism (and confirmation), we are already given to drink of that Spirit. So we need to stir that gift into flame, again and again in our lives.

Jesus in our gospel reading from John appears to his disciples and breathes the Spirit into them. This is still the day of his resurrection, and he offers them his peace. Then as he gives them the Holy Spirit, he says, "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Here we see the deep connection between the Spirit and peace, between the Spirit and reconciliation. Just as the Spirit is the source and impetus for our unity, he is also the source and impetus for our peace and reconciliation, with one another and with God.

The events in our country in the last several days shows just how far we still have to go to establish a just and lasting peace in our society. I'll let the video, audio, and pictures speak for themselves. But I would encourage us today and in the days and weeks ahead to continue to pray to the Holy Spirit, especially as our healer, our peacemaker, our reconciliation. I'll close with quoting the last several lines of our Pentecost Sequence, the ancient hymn that was sung after our second reading.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;

On our dryness pour your dew;

Wash the stains of guilt away:

Bend the stubborn heart and will;

Melt the frozen, warm the chill;

Guide the steps that go astray.

On the faithful, who adore

And confess you, evermore

In your sevenfold gift descend;

Give them virtue's sure reward;

Give them your salvation, Lord;

Give them joys that never end. Amen. Alleluia.