

PENTECOST SUNDAY – B – OLPH – 2015

(Acts 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:3-13; John 20:19-23)

An inmate from a prison wrote to his spiritual companion: "During my prayer and reflection, it dawned upon me a few days ago that I have never seen a prayer to the Holy Spirit. I'm sure there are some very good ones. It's just that there are none I've seen. So the other night while I was thinking about it, this prayer came to me:

"Holy heavenly Spirit. Embrace me with your Grace and your Love. Become my light, illuminating the Word of the Father and the Path to the Son, Jesus, who is my inspiration and my guiding hand. Help me to grow in faith and wisdom for the greater glory of God."

Wow, I wish I had come up with this prayer. It tells us everything we need to know about the Spirit and his role in our life. So now let me expand a little about the history of our celebrations. We are very much aware how our Easter has its roots in the Jewish feast of the Passover. And we are also very much aware of the remarkable parallels between these two celebrations. The Passover commemorates the liberation of the chosen people from slavery in Egypt while Easter is a celebration of the liberation of all humankind from slavery to sin. These parallels are not random, they are deliberately part of the plan of God and as Christians we quite definitely see the Passover as a clear and true foreshadowing event of the Easter mystery.

In the same way our Feast of Pentecost grew out of the Jewish Feast of Weeks which was celebrated fifty days after the Passover. The word Pentecost is Greek for fiftieth day. The Feast of Weeks was a day of rejoicing and was originally held as a feast of the first fruits of the harvest. However in later

times it came to commemorate the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai which established the Covenant between God and his people. It is a feast which continues to be celebrated by the Jews today.

Here we can see another wonderful parallel. The Jewish Feast of Pentecost celebrates the first Covenant God made with his people while Pentecost celebrates the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Church thus inaugurating the New Covenant which Christ had already sealed with his blood on the Cross of Calvary. On Pentecost Day the Jewish People commemorate the giving of the Ten Commandments by God to Moses. They call the Ten Commandments reverently by the single word the Law. So quite deliberately God chooses Pentecost Day to promulgate his new Law of Love which Jesus established. This New Covenant consists of one command: Love God with all your hearts, mind and strength and love one another as I have loved you.

God himself wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. The Holy Spirit writes the New Law of Love in the hearts of all believers. And there is yet one further link. The Jewish Pentecost was originally a harvest festival, now in the Christian Church Pentecost also can be seen as a harvest feast; but this time it is an abundant harvest of souls. On that first Pentecost, through the preaching of the Apostles in many tongues, hundreds – even thousands – were won over to faith in Christ Jesus. And year after year, all over the world many thousands are brought to faith in Christ by the witness and preaching of Christians.

In our readings today we actually see two outpourings of the Holy Spirit. The first of these occurs in the very first meeting of Jesus with the Apostles

after the resurrection as recorded by John the Evangelist. So generous is Jesus in his love that he does not delay to pour out the Spirit on the Apostles. Together with the Holy Spirit Jesus gave them three gifts.

First they experience the gift of forgiveness. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles wiped away any trace of sin, just as it happens in the sacraments, especially Baptism, Confirmation and Reconciliation. The apostolic ministry was to be one of forgiveness and healing and so quite naturally they experience forgiveness first.

With forgiveness they experience peace, its natural outcome. And this is the peace of Christ himself not some self-induced state of tranquility. My peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. (Jn14:27)

And with peace comes joy. A joy they had never experienced before, a joy beyond all others. This was the moment of fulfillment of everything they had been preparing for. All was now made clear; disaster turned into victory; fear turned into peace; sadness into joy.

The second outpouring of the Holy Spirit comes on Pentecost Day itself as we heard in the familiar first reading. Jesus is not to be seen for he has returned to the Father. No word from God is spoken—the sound of the wind is the language God chooses, the flames the sign of his presence.

The effects on the Apostles are twofold: They receive the gift of wisdom,—they are turned from ignorant fishermen into the most sublime theologians. And they are impelled to announce the Gospel of Christ to the world—it cannot be kept under wraps any longer, they find reserves of courage they never knew they had and they go forth to the ends of the earth and face all

kinds of dangers despite having been a timid little group huddled together in an upper room only a short time before.

We often say that Pentecost is the Birthday of the Church as though it was something that happens only once a year. The truth of the matter is that for Christians everyday is Pentecost Day. We are connected through faith with those Apostles and we experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on us in Baptism and Confirmation but since there is no limit to God's love, no restrictions on his Holy Spirit, he comes to us each day.

We live our entire Christian lives in the Spirit. The Spirit is ever-present to us, constantly prompts us and impels us forward in our life of faith. The Holy Spirit moreover draws us together in unity—as a parish we witness to what Christ has achieved but we do so as one body united in faith and worship with the Universal Church.

The Holy Spirit also keeps the Church holy—we are constantly cleansed and forgiven through the celebration of the sacraments.

And the Holy Spirit keeps us faithful—throughout the centuries the Church is kept free from error in matters of faith, despite all the new ideas, trends and philosophies. The Holy Spirit guides the Church in fidelity to the Gospel.

**COME HOLY SPIRIT
ENKINDLE YOUR FIRE OF LOVE
IN THE HEARTS OF YOUR FAITHFILLED PEOPLE
AND THROUGH THEM
RENEW THE FACE OF THE EARTH!**