

May 11, 2008

Pentecost Sunday

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

Gospel Reading: John 20: 19-23

Homilist: Deacon Mike Mocek

Before beginning my homily this morning, I would like to read a short poem. I dedicate this poem to the memory of my Mother and offer it as a small gift to all mothers, grandmothers, and mothers-to-be in our community. The author is Charlotte Carpenter and the title of the poem is "No One More Lovely."

***She walks in elegance whose heart  
Is filled with beauty, like the spring.  
Her gentleness is but a part  
Of all the joy her graces bring.  
The things she taught me at her knee  
Are honesty and faith and love.  
No one is lovelier than she  
Whose soul is joined with things  
above.***

Whether you are a mother, or you are spending time with your mother, or can only hold the memory of your mother in your heart, I hope you have a very special Mother's Day.

In addition to celebrating Mother's Day this weekend, we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the fiftieth day after Easter, when we remember the descent of the

Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. Pentecost is also popularly regarded as the birthday of the Church because it was from that point that the Apostles carried the message of Jesus Christ to the world.

As Jesus was nearing the end of his human ministry on earth, he began preparing the disciples for his departure. Anxiety was growing over the prospect of Jesus' death and he promised to send the Holy Spirit, partly to comfort his followers, but perhaps more importantly to challenge and enable them to continue his work. At the Last Supper, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now." He went on to say, "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you." The Gospel of John and the Gospel of Luke both record the appearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples in Jerusalem in the time between his Resurrection from the dead and his Ascension into Heaven.

John says Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." According to Luke, Jesus said, "Behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Then, in the Acts of the Apostles, which is believed to be the second volume of Luke's writing, we read the account of Pentecost. This was a dramatic event! The Apostles were in Jerusalem. Sound of strong wind filled the house where they were gathered. Tongues of fire appeared, then parted, and came to rest on each of them. They began speaking in tongues so that people from many places understood them in different languages.

As many of us reflect back to the early lessons of our own Christian formation, whether we were children or adults, this image of the Pentecost is probably one of the most vivid in our memories. And the most frequently asked question was likely to have been, "How did they do that?" Well, how it happened is not the key point. The importance of Pentecost is that the disciples of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit and none of their own, were energized and given the talent to begin spreading the message of

Christianity throughout the world, a mission that continues with us today.

I attended a gathering of my Small Church Community last Wednesday evening. While reflecting on the readings for this weekend, we entered into a lively discussion of the Holy Spirit. I did not say much during that discussion because I had already been struggling with this homily and I was listening for ideas. I heard some, and at risk of jeopardizing my relationship with other Small Church Community members, I will share them with you. One of the most profound observations I heard was that the Holy Spirit is difficult to understand because the Holy Spirit has no face. The more I thought about that the more it made sense and I suspect it will ring true with many of you. Jesus Christ came into the world as a human. He had a face. It may have been nothing like the faces we see depicted by artists but the fact that he was human and had a face helps us relate to him. Holy Scripture tells us we were created in the image of God. Therefore, many artists have offered illustrations of God with the face of a wise and kind father. Again, it helps us relate. But no such image exists for the third person of

the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Scripture provides us several physical metaphors for the Holy Spirit -- a dove, wind, and fire. But those models give us no help with the reality of God in the person of the Spirit. For that we have to turn inward and look into our own hearts and souls. That brings me to another observation from my Small Church Community gathering. We cannot expect the Holy Spirit to be an independent force "out there somewhere" that will cure the world's evils. The Holy Spirit works within each of us and empowers us, individually and as Church, to continue the work that Jesus Christ started. The Apostles received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and were commissioned to go out into the world and spread the Good News of the Gospel. Many gave their lives as martyrs carrying out that commis-

sion. Similarly, we received the Holy Spirit at our baptisms and confirmations and were commissioned to do our part -- to relieve the suffering of others, whether in our own community or half way around the world; to promote justice; and to work for peace in a world that is becoming increasingly violent and dangerous.

Those are very tall orders and they would be well beyond the abilities of any of us were it not for the power given to each of us by the Holy Spirit. Our question for reflection this week is, "How does the Holy Spirit empower me in my life?" I urge you to spend some time with that question over the next few days and consider what you and the power of the Holy Spirit can do to continue the work of Jesus Christ on earth.