

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11

Psalm 104

Galatians 5:16-25

John 15:26-27, 16:12-15

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May 20, 2018

In a departure from the norm for many of the Solemnities and Feasts of the Lord that we celebrate throughout the liturgical year, we did not hear the story of Pentecost in today's Gospel reading. The Gospel that we just heard is taken instead from Jesus' Last Supper discourse where he charges his disciples with the enormous responsibility of testifying to him after his departure, and he assures them that he will send the "Spirit of truth" to guide them. In this Gospel reading, Jesus is foretelling the events of Pentecost – events which were narrated for us today in our first reading, taken from the second chapter of Acts of the Apostles.

The observance of Pentecost has a long history in both Jewish and Christian traditions. For ancient Jews, it was an agricultural festival known as the Feast of Weeks or Feast of Harvest. It was an occasion for the community to come together and offer thanks to God for first fruits of their harvest, and it was celebrated seven weeks after they began harvesting grain. Over time, the agricultural connection was lost, and Pentecost came to be associated with the religious history of the Hebrew people. It became an observance of the covenant between God and God's people, and it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the first day of Passover. This was the reason "devout Jews from every Nation" were gathered in Jerusalem, as we heard in today's first reading. But the disciples of Jesus were there for a different reason. The first

chapter of Acts, which we heard last weekend as we celebrated the Ascension of the Lord, tells us that Jesus had instructed his followers to wait in Jerusalem to "be baptized with the Holy Spirit." They would receive the power of the Spirit, Jesus added, and would become his "witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

So, during the celebration of that first Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus, while the crowd gathered in the streets and the disciples waited in the upper room, a noise like strong wind filled the entire house where they were, and tongues of fire appeared, parted, and came to rest on each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, they overcame their fears, and they began to speak in foreign tongues such that all in the crowd understood them in their own languages. Christianity was born that day, and the rest, as they say, is history. The remaining chapters of Acts of the Apostles tell the story of how these spirit-filled and emboldened disciples spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and extended Christianity "to the ends of the earth." And now, Christians celebrate Pentecost to commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit to these earliest followers of Jesus on the fiftieth day following his resurrection on Easter Sunday.

The work of the Holy Spirit is far from done. And we cannot be content with simply celebrating the Spirit's appearance in that upper room in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. We need the Holy Spirit today just as much as the disciples did back then. In our second reading taken from his letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul calls us to live by the Spirit, which he contrasts with the desires of the flesh. Some have

misinterpreted Paul's words as condemning our bodies. But Paul is condemning behaviors, not bodies. The vices that he lists in this reading are sins of an unbridled ego – sins of self-gratification and sins that destroy relationships. Franciscan Father Richard Rohr, in his book Breathing Under Water, calls them perversions of our deepest human need for communion with God and with others. Living by the Spirit keeps us in communion with God and with others and, according to Paul, yields an abundance of fruits headed by love, joy, and peace.

We do not have to search far to see that we are living in a world dominated by many of the self-gratifying and destructive behaviors cited by Paul. We are in a moral crisis driven by fear, hate, and bigotry. We saw heart-wrenching evidence of that crisis once again on Friday, and we desperately need the help of the Holy Spirit to pull us out of it. Let us all resolve to work tirelessly for true peace and true justice in our time. Let us all take to heart the words of the refrain from today's responsorial psalm and make them our constant prayer – “Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.”