

Pentecost A-B-C
Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; Jn 20:19-23

Today, the Solemnity of Pentecost, marks the final part, the end of the Easter season. Pentecost is a joyful celebration of the Spirit's presence, a feast that celebrates the amazing energy of the Spirit that, on a street in Jerusalem long ago, drew visitors from many different countries and languages, into the energy of God's power and transformed them into a community. But the work of the Spirit did not end there, because the story of the Church is the story of a Spirit – guided Church; a Spirit that made its mark on that community from the beginning. There had been a sudden noise like a strong driving wind at Pentecost, followed by tongues of fire resting on each of the disciples. These images represent an effort to describe the overwhelming energy of the Spirit – the same Spirit that had come upon Mary at the Annunciation, upon Jesus at his baptism, and had then led him into the desert.

The Holy Spirit represents the power and presence of God within his believing community, in the individual lives of its members, and in all of creation. Jesus told Nicodemus that the wind of the Spirit blows where it wishes; the Spirit is unpredictable, and it cannot be limited or controlled. The Spirit brings light and knowledge, inspiration, wisdom, and courage. It is also a Spirit of rest, a life –giving Spirit, a Spirit of unity and harmony – a Spirit that pours out many different gifts of service on the members of the Church.

The Church of the apostles was, and is, a Spirit-guided community, a fact made clear in the Acts of the Apostles – not just from what happened on the day of Pentecost, but from what continued to happen in the early Church and continues today. The disciples soon began to share all their property in common, according to the needs of each member. When Peter was dragged before the Sanhedrin to account for himself, we're told he was "filled with the Holy Spirit," so much so that the Jewish leaders were amazed at his self-assurance and that of John, because they were seen as "uneducated men of no standing."

On another occasion, the community was praying for strength in the face of threats that had been made against them, and suddenly, the place where they were gathered began to shake, and they *"were filled with the Holy Spirit."* Barnabas and Saul, beginning their first mission journey to Cypress, were *"sent forth the by the Holy Spirit."*

Pentecost is Jesus' resurrection taking place symbolically once again through the coming of a new community into life. The energy of resurrection, shown in the rising of Jesus from the dead,

is now seen in the new life of a vibrant community through the power of the Spirit. But this isn't an event that only happened at the beginning – it continues to happen today. Every Christian community, and every individual disciple (follower), is transformed in the Spirit. It is the presence of the Spirit in power that makes the difference between an average, run-of-the-mill parish, and a community that is a light and example for its neighbors. A community of disciples is essentially (primarily) a unity of people who are filled with the Spirit.

The Spirit is a liberating (freeing, energizing) power. The disciples in today's Gospel were full of fear, hiding from their enemies behind locked doors, but their fear turned into courage and joy at the presence of Jesus and the gift of his Spirit. What is holding us back from allowing the Spirit to release his power within us? Very often it's some kind of fear – fear of what the Spirit may demand of us. We have slipped into a comfortable way of life, and we don't want to change. We know instinctively that change is what the Spirit will ask of us. What we forget is that the Spirit will be our strength and guide as we open ourselves up to transformation, and will become a more powerful presence within us. The Spirit will also bring our spirit joy, as it did the disciples in today's Gospel.

The joy of the Spirit is the kind of joy that cannot be taken away by the sufferings of life. It remains with us in spite of what we may be experiencing.

The presence of the Good News is to be found, not so much in the pages of the New Testament (Bible), but in the witness given by the lives of believing people.

As we celebrate this joyful feast of Pentecost and the powerful action of the Spirit in the early Church, we know it is the same Spirit that can also turn the witness of our lives into Good News.

- Fr. Stephen Lattner, O.S.B.