

Pentecost

Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor 12:3-7, 12-13; Jn 20:19-23

12 years ago, I gave my first homily as an ordained Deacon on Pentecost Sunday. I had been ordained the day before at the Cathedral, and that was quite an experience. One unfortunate part of that experience for my friends and family on that day was that they had gotten lost going to the Cathedral, because I had given them the wrong directions. Several people later told me that they eventually realized that they were being led astray and decided to change directions. The fancy word for this type of process is discernment.

We practice discernment all the time in a variety of situations. Perhaps the most difficult but most rewarding way of discerning is in discerning God's will.

Discerning God's will is like tuning an old radio. God's station is always on-line and broadcasting every minute of every day, but we have trouble picking up that signal. We need to adjust the dial and

tune out the static. This is done best by prayer, by reading the Bible, and with practice...lot's of practice.

I, usually, begin my discernment by saying a little prayer:

“Come Holy Spirit, Come, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love.”

When things work out just right, the signal comes in loud and clear...

That day on Pentecost, that we read about in our first reading, was one of those loud and clear moments.

The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, guidance, courage, grace, and respect for God.

They were enflamed by the breath of God.

In the Hebrew Bible, the breath of God is called “ruah”. It is the wind that swept across the waters of Creation in the Book of Genesis. It is the wind that swept through the Upper Room in the Acts of the Apostles, but it is also the breath of Jesus which he

imparted to his followers in the same Upper Room in John's Gospel.

This wind...this breath...made a new creation of Jesus' followers.

This was after all a frightened group of men and women, locked in the Upper Room. Jesus was gone...ascended to the Father. They felt scared, alone and perhaps a little abandoned.

In some ways we are like these disciples. Fear grips us, too.

Fear of the unknown; fear of others; fear of different ideas; fear of the world. It can be so great that this fear can build walls and locked doors around us. We are in that upper room.

But, Jesus promised his followers a Comforter...someone who would sweep the fear away like a mighty wind...someone who would sweep away fear with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, guidance, courage, grace, and respect for God.

If...if we invite the Spirit in...

If we invite the Spirit in, one man, one woman, one child is more powerful than any army known...more powerful than any force in the universe...because, with the Holy Spirit, size does NOT matter. Because with the Holy Spirit a handful of Jewish men and women could change a world in a way that only the Roman Empire could dream of.

Because with the Holy Spirit there is wisdom, understanding, knowledge, guidance, courage, grace, and respect for God.

And when we go in the wrong direction...when we go astray, God's "ruah...the breath of God stirs the waters again.

When an Egyptian priest named Arius convinced a growing Church in the 4th Century that Jesus was not divine, God's breath stirred another Egyptian priest, Athanasius, to bring us back to the truth.

When the Church had grown encrusted with wealth and power in the Middle Ages, God's breath stirred Francis of Assisi to bring us back to the truth.

When the Church was stained with schism and petty politics,
God's breath stirred Catherine of Sienna to bring us back to the
truth.

So many times, so many people...young and old, men, women and
children ...all stirred by the breath of God to bring us back to the
truth.

God's breath freshens the air

God's breath lets us breathe

God's breath brings comfort and understanding, wisdom and
knowledge, grace and courage, and a respect for God.

God's breath is ours and fills us when we take part in the
sacraments.

God's breath can take a kid who usually was having his ears and
collar pulled by the Sisters of St. Joseph and turn him into a
Deacon.

God's breath unites us in love whether we are conservative or
liberal, Christian or Jew, woman or man, enslaved or free...

And as St. Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians:

There are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit

There are a variety of services, but the same Lord

There are a variety of activities but the same God

who activates all of them in everyone

For in the One Spirit, we are all baptized into one body

Be open to the Holy Spirit

Let “ruah” the breath of God blow away fear and divisiveness

Let the Spirit fill you, surround you and nourish you

“Come Holy Spirit, Come, fill the hearts of your faithful and
enkindle in them the fire of your love.”