

HOMILY PENTECOST SUNDAY - YEAR A

“Live in the Spirit”

(Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104; 1 Cor 12:3-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23)

A missionary in China was approached by an elder who told him, “Reverend Father, I have no trouble understanding God the Father, and I have no trouble understanding God the Son, but I am having a difficult time understanding the Honourable Bird!”

Live in the Spirit of Pentecost

A new understanding of this feast of Pentecost came to me in prayer one day - Pentecost is our experience of Resurrection, as well as the birth of the Church.

Traditionally, Pentecost is celebrated as the beginnings of the Church. The apostles receive the promised Spirit of Jesus and they are transformed, go out to all nations, spread the word and the Church is born.

Pentecost is also the way we are to be, or live, as Church. The Spirit that we receive now takes us through what happened to Jesus, as our way of being Church, his Body. The passion, resurrection, appearances, and ascension that all happened to Jesus – during Holy Week we are in a way spectators – it is like we just sit and watch it all happen to him.

Pentecost, however, dynamically inserts us into that pattern. We receive the Spirit of Jesus, who now takes us through what happened to him, and it happens to us. We are empowered to go back into our own passion (our own past hurts and pain), our deaths (our own personal losses), our resurrection (we are survivors), our appearances (our need to deal with our hurts and mourn our losses), and finally our own ascension (we forgive the hurt, and accept the losses). In and through the Spirit of Pentecost, we are propelled to follow Jesus through our own cross to resurrection and new life.

This new life is striking in contrast to the way most people live. Peace, Jesus’ first word to his disciples, is the sure sign of resurrection faith. Joy is their reaction - and that can be our daily bread as Church, as part of the risen body of Christ. Forgiveness is our work, our daily activity. Healing of life’s hurts is the bread and butter of the Church’s role in the world.

What is your experience of Pentecost? How has the Spirit been at work in your life? Allow me to share one of my own experiences of the Spirit working in my life.

Once when I was on an Oblate renewal program in San Antonio, Texas, my spiritual director encouraged me to see a counsellor, as I would never have that kind of opportunity again. Though very resistant, I obeyed him and found a counsellor and started telling him my experience of my struggle to forgive my father for the way he raised us as kids. The counsellor stopped me cold when he interrupted me to say, “Sylvain, arguing with your dad for all those years out of anger is not the same as sitting down with your dad and sharing your feelings of anger with him.”

I was stunned, and knew exactly what I had to do. I did a one day retreat and wrote a seven page

letter to my deceased father sharing with him all the feelings about how he had raised us that I had never told him when he was still alive. I then read the letter out loud to a pillow, imagining that my father was listening. When the counsellor asked me during our next session if it was more like an adult-to-adult relationship with my father now, I was stunned. That was it! We were friends now, who had shared feelings together, and no longer me the child and him the big daddy.

When I drove home I swear that the color of the world had changed, had become brighter, as if I were wearing amber motorcycle goggles – so amazing an experience was this. I felt like I had received my father's Spirit, and that he was now with me in a new way.

What a powerful experience of the communion of the saints that was – if I was healing in my relationship with him, here on earth, then I believe that he was healing in his relationship with me, wherever he was. I had a sense that because of this act of reconciliation, that he was entering heaven. I felt so energized and excited – this was truly faith alive. What a gift that was – a gift that this gospel is inviting us all to share with Jesus in his relationship to the Father.

Pentecost fills us with the Spirit, and makes us one family in Christ. The Spirit is the blood that makes us all brothers and sisters in Christ, and challenges us to move beyond the constrictions of family and kinship clans.

What do we need to do? Pray daily for the Spirit. Bishop Sheen did that every day, and joked that if he was still selfish on the day he died, it would be God's fault, not his, because he daily prayed for the spirit of healing.

The Eucharist that we now celebrate is a powerful gift of the Spirit that nourishes us and strengthens our minds, hearts and bodies in Christ.

So, remember – today is the first day of the rest of your life. Live in the Spirit - be the Body of Christ here on earth.