

HOMILY - PENTECOST SUNDAY YEAR C

“Pentecost: Participation in a New Creation”

(Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104; Romans 8:8-17; John 14:15-16, 23b-26)

Alleluia! Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Alleluia!

My brothers and sisters, Pentecost is all about participating in God’s new creation through the Spirit.

In the beginning the “Ruah” or breath of God breathed over the chaos and the universe was created. Almost immediately, however, things went wrong. Adam and Eve sinned; Cain killed Able; the false pride of humans caused God to confuse the languages at the Tower of Babel, and God started over with the flood. Even that did not do it, as humanity broke covenant after covenant with God (Adam and Eve; Noah; Abraham; Moses) – all were broken; all had to be renewed.

Finally God sent Jesus, his own Son, who as the Lamb of God would establish a new covenant through the sacrifice of his own life, through his Body and Blood. He would be totally faithful; do God’s will, and initiate the reign of God here on earth, through the power of the Spirit.

The Pentecost event is the birth of that new creation. As a baby is held and spanked so that it would catch its breath and start living life in a new way, so too the giving of the Spirit on that day was humanity catching its breath to start living in this new creation.

The Pentecost event involved not just wind, but also fire. The coming of the Spirit as a powerful wind, like the Ruah or breath of God over the original chaos of the first creation, was a reminder that this too was an act of creation. The coming of the Spirit as tongues of fire, however, signalled newness, that this was more than just another creation. This was a new creation, a re-creation of the human heart.

The wind could move things externally and shake the house. The tongues of fire would purify and transform the hearts of humans. This new creation is not just a physical, natural one, visible to the eye, as was the first creation, but a new, internal creation of the human heart, mind and soul. It happens only to those who believe in Jesus; who open themselves up to receive his Spirit in their hearts and lives.

The miracle of Pentecost was a double miracle. The disciples were able to speak a new language, and the people who heard them speak, understood in their own languages. It was a reversal of the confusion of the Tower of Babel, a sign of the healing power of this new creation.

The miracle of Pentecost affected people from all over the known world at that time, a sign that this new creation is universal, meant to include all people, the whole world, indeed the whole universe. But it will only happen when we move beyond the amazement and astonishment of the people at that time to faith.

Amazement and astonishment belong to the first creation, as a response to the on-going discoveries

of science and astrology. The new creation of the Spirit demands faith in Jesus Christ, and a life of love lived in his Spirit. It demands a totally trusting reception of the promised Spirit into our hearts, minds and lives. It involves the radical in-dwelling of the Triune God in our hearts, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It involves being taught and transformed by the fire of the Spirit that will burn away all impurities within us. As Paul puts it in his letter to the Romans, “if you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live, for all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”

Ultimately, we are called to live as totally new creatures in the Kingdom of God, new creations ourselves. We are called to witness to the reality of that Kingdom, that new creation, by our lives of holiness and love. Through the power of the Spirit, God is within us and we are in God, and we must be about building up the Reign of God here on earth.

Many of you know that my brother Louis had an operation for a brain tumour that proved to be an aggressive form of cancer. For twenty nine months he responded to treatment in such a positive fashion that his doctor called it a miracle. His last MRI, however, revealed that the tumour has started to grow again. He is now taking chemo pills on a daily basis, and once again living in faith, hope and uncertainty.

But this time there is a change. My sister-in-law Judy shared with me that they have arrived at a certain peace about the harsh reality of his illness. She is grateful for the unexpected months of life that he has already experienced. She is in awe at how the Spirit has been at work in the lives of so many people who receive her periodic communications about their journey through this dark valley of sickness. A priest friend wrote that their struggle has given him the most spiritual Easter he has ever experienced. Another friend, who never prays, said that she is praying for Louis. They have a sense that all things are in God’s hands. I believe that their faith in Jesus and his In-dwelling Spirit has made them truly participants in that new creation that God has wrought through Jesus and the gift of his Spirit.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a miracle in itself, a participation in that new creation. In the Spirit, Jesus is present in each one who gathers. In the Spirit, Jesus is present in the proclamation of his Word. Through the prayer to the Holy Spirit, humble gifts of bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. And through the Spirit, we who receive with humble faith and repentant hearts, are transformed into the Body of Christ ourselves, into a new creation, healed, forgiven and sent out to spread the Good News of this new creation.

So remember, Pentecost is all about participating in God’s new creation through the Spirit.

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