

Acts 2:1-21
Romans 8:22-27
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

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Pentecost Sunday
May 20, 2018

On this birthday of Pentecost, we celebrate God's gift of the Spirit, which creates and directs the Church, empowering Christians to effectively communicate the Gospel in a variety of ways. The purpose is to serve the common good, inspired by our Advocate. All three lessons have a theme of reassurance. Why? It seems everybody gets tired and discouraged in facing the distractions, temptations and pressures of this world. Doubts and fears get in the way of our witness. When we prosper, however, we sometimes succumb to illusions of conceit and pride, no longer connected to people in need who God desires for us to help. We know God gave the Church to the world to express His love, but it seems our human failings speak more loudly, making the Gospel message very hard to hear or see.

Some people refuse to acknowledge the spiritual dimension of life, as Jesus said: "There are none so blind as those who will not see, or deaf that will not listen." But I think there are a lot of people who are spiritually hungry. They may not consider themselves to be religious, but they seek some kind of personal encounter with God.

A church member is someone who continues to say "yes" to one's Baptism, committing to our common purpose of building up the Body of Christ in some form of personal ministry. We count our blessings and strive to be a blessing to others as God's ambassador, praying the Holy Spirit will guide us as circumstances change. We've all known high points and low points in our lives and faith, and usually these were connected. I don't think anyone is immune from discouragement. We are all in need of the Holy Spirit, some sign how the Lord is working within our lives and within our community of faith.

What do you look for in seeking the presence of God? Certainly we are impressed by the miraculous... unexplained rescues and healings which have no other explanation than a gift from Heaven. But in all humility, we are not in control of such miracles. These come from God, on a timetable we can't manipulate. I've prayed for miracles, and still do, but can't seem to schedule one. Members have witnessed to me the miracles in faith they've experienced, and I can recount moments of grace in my life, but we can't say the degree of miraculous power had anything to do with our level of faith. Faith is the joy and peace beyond one's ability to understand when you put your trust in the Lord. You don't know what the future holds, but you know God holds your future.

I do understand the desire for signs of the Holy Spirit at work, and believe the Lord reveals these blessings in due season. Frankly, when people are hurting, I want miraculous healing now! When someone is dying, in addition to proclaiming the love and forgiveness from God, I pray for life. In times of war, I pray for peace. I don't know how many prayers it will take. How many people are needed to convince God to act? This probably should be turned around to ask: how many praying people need to be convinced by God to act?

Perhaps in our prayer-life, we become hearing-impaired. We ask the Lord to answer our prayers. There are so many hungry people, so many who are lonely, discouraged and wounded. Feed them, Lord, befriend and heal them. And then we wait for some sign. Could it be, Jesus has already given the green light? "Yes, feed, befriend and heal these brothers and sisters. I send you. You are My witnesses!" Consider how robust our prayer-life could be!

We understand our human limitations of patience, and don't always understand God's infinite patience. Even when we must say "no" to requests, can we still say "yes" to the relationships? In the face of disappointment and conflict, can we demonstrate forgiveness and peace? Would any of us want to rely on our own capacities? Might it be God's grace when families and friendships survive the tests of time?

Communication is necessary for any fruitful relationship, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to overcome the hindrances created by our inability or unwillingness to listen. There are too many tragic consequences in families, in communities and between nations. When we pray for the Holy Spirit to come, we're praying for a communication miracle. This is what is described in the book of Acts. It's not like we can control, repeat or recreate the first Pentecost, but the power of God's Word teaches us how the Spirit of Christ overcomes the obstacles of this world, promising His grace is sufficient as we commit ourselves to ministry. St. Paul says the full variety of these gifts of the Spirit can be used to build up the Body of Christ. God intercedes in our prayers even if these simply be sighs too deep for words.

In our culture, it is challenging to become a "community of faith." We are more likely to think about ourselves as a gathering of individuals who have faith in common. This is not exactly what God seems to have in mind. Spiritual gifts may be discerned within individuals, but the purpose is for the community of faith to collectively embody God's presence in the world. St. Paul describes spiritual unity eloquently in 1 Corinthians 12:26, saying: "If one weeps, we all weep. If one rejoices, we all rejoice" The Spirit of God creates a community, forged out of individuals, but molded into something more profound than simply the sum of all our parts.

Jesus described the Spirit as being like the wind. Wind moves where it wants, and we can't see it. But we can see where it has been. It moves across our bodies, we feel it on our faces; we see it in the trees. The Spirit moves into our lives and creates community. There will be dreams and visions. There will be signs in the heavens and on earth. There will be fear, but also comfort. The purpose of this is to enable all creation to see the salvation of our Lord. The Church is not the building, but within relationships which demonstrate God's presence, somehow beyond our capabilities. Birthdays celebrate how we're still alive and kicking!

God our Creator continues to say "yes" to our lives. What is Christ calling you to do? Keep looking for a sign. Keep praying. Pray for each one in the congregation ... how each of us, through our spiritual gifts, may become a sign of our Lord's Kingdom.

Amen.