

The Fire of Love Pentecost Sunday/A June 8, 2014 9:00 AM Acts 2:1-11;
1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; Jn 7:37-39 (Christ has given each of us power to bring about a new kingdom through the Holy Spirit, and we all have a worthy and noble share in the work of God.)

Many people say **Pentecost** is the birthday of the Church. That is all right to say, except what Pentecost celebrates is not one day in the life of the Church, but rather **an ongoing revelation**, a pouring forth of divine energy that began already at Jesus' resurrection, and continues to this very day. And if it did not, we would have no reason to be here today or any day. **We depend upon the Holy Spirit for our existence as believers.**

Although the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles is very intriguing, it is really the message of the gospel and of St. Paul that really demand our attention. In the Gospel according to John, **Jesus** stands before his disciples on the **very evening of the resurrection** and he **breathes on them the Holy Spirit**. This is to give them a power they need but did not have, a power we need but do not have in our own human nature. **It is the power to forgive those who hurt us, those who hate us, those who persecute us.** We need that power to get beyond the hurts of life, but ordinarily we do not have the power to do so.

I have found many people in life who because of something that happens to them, something unjust, something mean, something hurtful just stop living, just stop growing. And this is, of course, being devastated; and from time to time in life, **we all can experience being devastated. But when we allow someone's ill will toward us to stop our life or to stop our growth, whom are we really hurting?** Whom are we punishing? Ourselves! But this is the way human beings often are. We need the power to overcome hatred and ill will and meanness and evil in every form.

Furthermore, the gospel sends forth Jesus' believers to **remake the world in divine justice**. But how can we, if we ourselves are broken inwardly? **If we have no peace within ourselves, we will not be messengers of God.** We can see in secular society many revolutions have begun zealous, full of a certain righteous anger, desiring true justice, and yet so often they burn themselves out. They destroy themselves because they try to fight fire with fire. **The revolution Jesus initiates, that he called the "kingdom of God," fights only with the fire of love. It heals its warriors first and equips them with the power of the Holy Spirit so that peace can be the seedbed of justice.** And this process of reconciliation goes on into eternity. Even the saints need reconciliation. Yes, they are holy, but they are still wounded. Yes, they are holy, but still perpetrators of woundedness. That is the human condition.

Now from the standpoint of John's Gospel, which we read today, **going out and initiating reconciliation and forgiveness is the primary mission of the Church**, as opposed to what? As opposed to Matthew's idea of making disciples of all nations. It's a different way of looking at this great purpose of the Church. It is to initiate reconciliation.

Now do we imagine this role for ourselves? **Do we think of ourselves as sent forth from God to bring reconciliation wherever we are living:** in our families, in our workplaces, in

our neighborhoods, in our country? Do we think of ourselves as ambassadors of the living Christ sent to bring reconciliation to a violent and angry world that is often violent against us and angry with us? This is the very challenging role of a follower of Christ. **This takes the courage and the fortitude and the strength of the Holy Spirit.** It is not a mission to be undertaken lightly. And hardly anything in the world is more needed today—hardly anything!

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul himself is actually hurting. He is grieving because this **beloved community is tearing itself apart with all kinds of rivalry.** He is painfully aware of the fact that he is sent to bring reconciliation to the whole world, starting with, of course, believers. He is painfully aware that the believers are to share this work, and yet he wonders how can they when they are not even united together, when their own relationships are so torn asunder with—what?—with rivalry, and a rivalry, oddly enough, **based on the way they see themselves in the Spirit.** Paul found this very troubling.

Some of the people in Corinth regarded themselves as superior to all the others because they believed the gifts of the Spirit given them were greater than the gifts given to others. And Paul thought this was disgraceful. Others in Corinth thought of themselves as inferior because they thought that the gifts they received were very ordinary and plain and maybe boring. Paul thought this was disgraceful. **Comparing ourselves to others can lead either to arrogance or to envy.** Both are vicious. **Both destroy relationships.**

St. Paul insists that **the same Spirit is the source of all gifts,** and that there is a fundamental equality within the body, not because of the quality of the gifts, but because all the gifts come from the very same source; and they are ultimately **for the same purpose: building up the body.** At this point we might recall what Jesus said, “From those who have much, much will be required.” It is pointless to envy people who have more gifts, because they owe more to God. Whether those gifts are material or spiritual, it doesn’t matter. It’s a basic principle: **from those to whom much has been given, much will be required.** So we have to keep this in mind because whether we are speaking about spiritual gifts or material gifts, the fact is in our world some people have more. But, according to Jesus, they also have more responsibility to share those gifts, **to use those gifts for the kingdom of God.** Unfortunately, in our secular world ideas of fairness and sometimes what is called justice blur this distinction, this connection between gifts and responsibility.

So this great feast of Pentecost is reminding us of two things. First of all, there is **the power that Christ has given to each of us to bring about a new kingdom** marked by peace and justice, where true forgiveness is possible, where true reconciliation is possible, not because of human choices or human abilities, but **because of the divine redemptive love of God that resides in us through the Holy Spirit.** Secondly: It is also reminding us that all of us, however small and humble, **all have a worthy and noble share in the work of God.** And if there needs to be any rivalry, let that rivalry be showing respect to one another and being the servant of all.