

Homily

Pentecost A 6.4.17

Father Todd Molinari

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we celebrate the great solemnity of Pentecost - the sending forth of the Holy Spirit upon all the disciples and the birth of the universal Church. Today is the final day of the Easter season and a day of great rejoicing! This great celebration is not meant for us to close in on ourselves and affirm how wonderful we are. Rather, the Spirit is imparted to us in order to send us out into the world, proclaiming the Jesus Christ to every nation, language and culture, so that all people may come to faith in Christ. Pentecost celebrates that we as the Church don't just have a mission, we are the mission of Christ Risen from the dead to bring about the kingdom of God.

Pentecost was originally a Jewish fertility festival, commemorating the first plantings of seeds and the anticipation of new life as a gift of God. It became a great celebration for the People of God, where they would gather together at the Temple of Jerusalem, singing their praises of God, but it also became a vehicle for the hopes of the People for the final in-gathering of all nations when the Messiah arrived. This hope is now in the process of being realized with the resurrection of Jesus and the sending of His Spirit upon the Apostles and upon the entire Church.

God gives us the Spirit, as St. Paul says, "to the aid of our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings." So the Spirit is not whatever I make it to be and He is not wish-fulfillment. The Spirit helps me to be an Apostle, to be "one who is sent" and "one who prays as he/she ought." What is more meaningful in life than discovering the meaning and purpose of my life in God? This is why the Spirit is given to us, and this is what keeps the bonds of unity strong within the Church, despite of our sins, weaknesses and failings. The sending of the Spirit tells me that this is not about me. It's about continuing the work of the Gospel and to be the Body of Christ in the world today.

Jesus quotes Scripture as he helps us to prepare for the coming of the Spirit: "Rivers of living water will flow from within him who believes in me." Indeed, the Spirit gives life, resurrected life, that will never end. But what are the implications of this? It means that we, like the Blessed Mother and the Apostles, are called to live lives of total openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit. St. John XXIII, in opening the Second Vatican Council, said that he wanted to "open the windows of

the Church to let in the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit and let it blow freely.” Yet how often we live lives, even in our Church, where we prefer to put up walls rather than allowing in the the Spirit?

I remember a few years ago I came to a parish that was badly divided over some decisions that were made and also due to some pretty strong personality conflict. I remember at the first meetings I attended where there was a great deal of anger, hurt and division, and even where I was sometimes on the receiving-end of some of the divisiveness. Suffice it to say, part of me wanted to “get out of Dodge” and find sunnier pastures to be a pastor. But one day I got a phone call from the elderly pastor from the parish next door. He said, “Hey, how are things going? I thought I’d just call and check in on you as my new neighbor.” With those simple words I took that opening and just poured out to him all that had been going on and my hopes and fears. He invited me over for coffee the next day, and that began a process of being able to receive some Spirit-Inspired wisdom and a close bond of friendship that helped guide and sustain me, but more importantly it gave me the strength and courage to entrust the situation in the parish to the Spirit, and in doing so I was, together with the parish, able to begin a long and arduous process of healing and reconciliation with in the community.

The Holy Spirit wants all of us to have those rivers of living water and the breath of life-giving wind, but the first steps are to practice openness, humility and a willingness to grow through our failings and need for help. We must not allow our pride to cloud our judgements of other people and situations. No. We all have the tendency to “dig in our heels” and to close ourselves off from the movement of the Spirit.

Pope Francis, echoing St. John XXIII, has challenged all of us to “open wide the doors of the Church to the world.” It is so much easier to keep the church doors closed and to reject the world. But this is not what Christ wants for us. He sends the Holy Spirit to us to make us His Church and to lead the world to the kingdom. Reconciliation and mercy are for everyone. And the Spirit empowers us to make present the kingdom of God, no matter how challenging the situation. Let us implore God for a renewed sending of the Holy Spirit upon the entire People of God today.