

HOMILY for the FEAST of PENTECOST – Year ABC

Reflecting on the work of the Holy Spirit on the Feast of Pentecost, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A man was trying to obtain a flat in Bombay. After many days of fruitless search, he was returning to his slum home when he stopped to buy a tender coconut. But, when he cut open the top of the coconut, smoke issued out & to the poor man's astonishment a huge genie materialized.

"Command & I will obey!" thundered the genie.

With awakening hope, the man stuttered out, "I want a flat in Bombay."

"If I could get a flat for myself in Bombay," retorted the genie, "do you think I would have stayed inside a coconut?"

Anyway, as the cute story might have suggested, everyone loves to see magic & expects extra-ordinary things to happen as often as possible. In fact, based on all the popular books & movies such as Peter Pan & Captain Hook, or Harry Potter, we could see that people like to see things appear & vanish magically. What the public does not realize is that all the magical work could never happen without the involvement of the spirit. The spirit has to work behind the scene to make a cool magic happen. Our world would not be the same without the presence of the spirit. Likewise, the Christian Church would not be able to survive in this world without the help of the Holy Spirit. That is why the Church calls us to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost this Sunday to give thanks to God for the blessing of the Holy Spirit in our lives & learn a little more about it. Unlike the world & its interest in the spirit in general, we Christians focus particularly on the "Holy" Spirit & its amazing work in the Church.

To help us celebrate the blessing of the Holy Spirit in the Church & learn more about it, let's see how this Sunday's Readings tell us about it. Here's how the Gospel lets us know about its beginning, "...At the sight of the Lord, the disciples rejoiced, 'Peace be with you,' He said again. 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' Then He breathed on them & said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive one's sins, they are forgiven. If you hold them bound, they are held bound.'" Evidently Jesus breathed on the early disciples & blessed them with the Holy Spirit as He sent them out to continue His mission of salvation. But, as you can see, the Holy Spirit is compared to the breath of fresh air. In other words, we might not be able to see the Holy Spirit in physical form; but we can feel its effects in our daily lives. Indeed, the First Reading tells us how the Holy Spirit was able to help the early disciples speak in various languages & preach Jesus' Good News to different groups of people. That is how the early disciples were able to reach new members beyond the Jewish community. Meanwhile, the Second Reading lets us know other blessings that the Holy Spirit could do besides speaking in various languages. Paul said, "...There are different gifts but the same Spirit; there are different ministries but the same Lord; there are different works but the same God who accomplishes all of them in everyone. To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." So, Paul believed that each & every one of us has been blessed with various gifts/talents from the Holy Spirit. Hopefully we would make good use of them for the common good & Jesus' mission, not like what we have seen the rich & the powerful are doing now with God's blessings for them.

Surely we have heard about seven gifts of the Holy Spirit that we have been given on the day of our Confirmation. If you have forgotten, let me name those for you: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, & fear of the Lord. We certainly could use those gifts in our daily lives. But, I think our world, especially our country, could benefit much more from the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit in this day & age. Again, in case you do not remember them, here are those fruits: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, & chastity. Among those twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit, which one would you need the most in your life? Which one do you think our world/country might need right now? As you reflect on those questions, let me comment on the fruits of charity & generosity because I believe those are most needed in our world these days.

If you ask me what is lacking in our current world, I would say, “charity” without any hesitation. Jesus taught us two simple Commandments of “Loving God & loving our neighbors.” Unfortunately, love/charity is what our current world lacks the most. Let’s begin with the Holy Land, where we have seen constant fighting. Have its residents lost all the love for their neighbors over the years of squabbling? Lately, we have even witnessed horrific scene of hungry children fighting for food & survival, & yet the whole world could not find any compassion & solution for them. Has the human heart run out of charity for the desperate & the hungry? Similarly, our country claims to be the most Christian nation in the world; & yet we do not have any love left to share with the world because we have cut funding & destroyed many charity organizations that have been dedicated to helping the destitute. I would prefer our country to call itself secular because being a Christian demands it to be charitable to the world as Jesus would command it. So, we must be charitable to show the world our unique Christian way of life, a life full of fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Another fruit of the Holy Spirit that our world desperately needs right now is generosity. We have all heard that the list of millionaires & billionaires on Forbes Magazine has grown tremendously every year. Yet, the world does not seem to have enough wealth. Instead of giving back to the community, especially the poor & the misfortunate, the rich & the powerful have tried to avoid paying more taxes while looking for new ways to cut meager benefits from the poor & the lowly. We have also seen big companies & their executives get huge profits & pay raises while average workers have had to demand for some wage increase by going on strikes. We must not let that selfish & greedy spirit corrupt our conscience & destroy our Christian community. We should be generous in sharing our time, talents, & treasure with our community & push back that selfish & greedy spirit of the rich & the powerful. That is how we could show our world to be generous & learn to share God’s blessings with one another.

My dear brothers & sisters, last Sunday I lamented that the Church & its clergy have not preached enough about Heaven. This Sunday I suggest that the Church needs to challenge & encourage its members to follow a virtuous lifestyle by living up to the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirits, instead of following its political & social agenda. That is what Jesus would want it to do. That is how we could show the world that we are a community filled with the Holy Spirit & distinguish ourselves from the rest of the world.