

Father O'Connor's Homily on 19 May 2024
Pentecost Sunday-B

Acts of the Apostles 2: 1-11
1 Corinthians 12: 3b-7, 12-13 or Galatians: 5: 16-25
John 20: 19-23 or John 15: 26-27; 16: 12-15

Today is the Feast of Pentecost. We celebrate: (1) the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Apostles and the disciples and their Confirmation, (2) the birthday of the Church and (3) the close of the Easter season and its "Fifty Days of Joy."

Pentecost is a Greek word that means "**THE FIFTIETH DAY.**"
Seven weeks and one day ago was Easter Sunday.

Pentecost is a word that the Jewish people use as well. That is why in the Acts of the Apostles there were so many Jewish people in Jerusalem for their Feast of Pentecost.

The Jewish Pentecost was originally a spring harvest festival. It is celebrated each year on the fiftieth day after Passover, the monumental event when God freed His chosen people from slavery in Egypt.

The Jewish Pentecost also commemorates that fiftieth day after their Exodus from Egypt when Moses went up the mountain of Sinai and received from God the Ten Commandments of the Law.

So fifty days after their release from slavery in Egypt, the Jewish people were given the Law – and the Jewish nation was born.

And fifty days after Easter, the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles and the disciples who were gathered in prayer – and the Church was born.

You will notice, in the first reading from Acts of the Apostles, that when the Holy Spirit came upon those Apostles and disciples, they saw **TONGUES OF FIRE** over each other's heads. That fire was a symbol of the presence and power of God.

Remember when Moses went up the mountain, he encountered God in the burning bush – in the flames, which symbolized the presence and power of God.

Right now, I ask you to picture that first Pentecost in your mind, with the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit coming down upon the Apostles and the disciples. There is the sound of strong wind, and tongues of fire appear over their heads. And from that Pentecost event, the ones who

had been scared to death became courageous with life and carried the powerful and saving message of Jesus Christ to the world.

From this Pentecost scene I would like to center upon one word today. And that word is *power*. And on three levels: the power of our world, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the power in each of our lives.

First, there is the power of our world. Power is the ability to do things. We have all kinds of power around and within us. We have physical power – strength. We have mental power – intelligence. We have will power – being able to say “yes” or “no.” We have political power, economic power, social power, digital power and so on. There is power to be found in our world.

Second, there is the power of the Holy Spirit.

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His disciples: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” [Acts 1: 8].

How are we enabled to be His witnesses? Through the power of the Holy Spirit that we receive.

Now, I must do an aside here for a moment and tell you about a great temptation for us who preach homilies. And the temptation is this: having talked about the power of our world and the power of the Holy Spirit, to then clobber the one and to exalt the other.

I am going to resist that temptation today and make another suggestion: that we take the legitimate power that we have from our world and link it with the divine power that we receive from the Holy Spirit.

And to do what? As we prayed in today’s Responsorial Psalm [104]: “Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.” We are to help renew our world according to the vision, according to the dream, that God has for us.

And third, how are we to do this? We have been given a share in the power of the world and in the power of the Holy Spirit. So the opportunity for us is to link them together.

I look at you today, and there is a lot of power right here in this church. Every single one of you is a powerful person no matter what your age or background, education or calling. Even babies are powerful persons.

Look at the power that a crying baby has to summon our immediate attention!

We all have power. It is important to remember that the more power we have, the greater our responsibility to be men and women for others. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us so that we stay on course as faithful disciples of Jesus who is Himself the Way and the Truth and the Life – and not get side-tracked by the deceitful snares of the Evil One.

On this Feast of Pentecost, I am going to ask you to do something that may at first sound a bit haughty or prideful. And here it is: to take some time today and reflect on how powerful you are.

Think about what you can do. Think about the people that you are able to influence. And when you realize the power that you have, then consciously link that power with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Use that linked power perhaps to go out to someone who feels isolated and lonely and bring them some companionship. Use that power to listen to someone who needs an understanding ear and bring them some connection. Use that power to offer someone an opportunity that you can give them to help them become “a better version of themselves.”

Instead of complaining about American political life, use that linked power perhaps to run for public office or to help shape legislation guaranteeing that every human life really does matter and deserves our care and respect from the moment human life begins at conception until God calls each person home – and all the days and years in between. Use that linked power to make your own little corner of God’s earth a better place for you and for someone else to live in.

Our world has power. You have power. Link that power with the power of the Holy Spirit. And begin to imagine what you can do in this world when you let the Holy Spirit loose in your life!

Come, Holy Spirit.
Fill the hearts of your faithful.
And enkindle in them the fire of your love.

Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

Come, Holy Spirit. Come.