

Pentecost, Year A

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...." (Acts 2:4)

May 31, 2020

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Pentecost: How are we celebrating the birth of the Church today?

Today is the last Sunday in May, and we are celebrating the Solemnity of Pentecost. However, it's different from previous years: Our usual celebration of people with diverse culture and language is not seen anywhere in Saitama Diocese. On Monday, May 25, the government lifted the declaration of a state of emergency in the last 5 restricted prefectures including Saitama. However, public masses and meetings will remain suspended at the parishes in our diocese for a little while longer. A funeral Mass can be offered as long as the pastor maintains the physical conditions of "avoiding the three C's (3密, closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings)" by arranging it with the family of the deceased and the liturgical team.

Before giving my commentary on how Luke the Evangelist tells the story of the birth of the Church through the descent of the Holy Spirit, I'd like to invite each of you to live in the presence of the Holy Spirit deep down in your heart, for it is within our hearts where the real encounter with God and the spiritual conversion take place.

The Church began its voluntary suspension of public Masses ("in church quarantine") shortly after the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday this year, and we have not been able to gather together to celebrate Mass as a community to this day. At the beginning some of you may have taken it as a spiritual vacation, putting your prayers and the Word of God aside and feeling comfortable about this new style. On the other hand, many more of you must have taken your faith life more seriously, deepening and nourishing your inner life through the rosary prayer and personal meditations on the Word of God from the daily liturgy. This attitude has made you more confident in the presence of Jesus the Risen in your lives. This means that you have experienced what St. Ignatius calls "contemplation in action" (touching the presence of God while doing something) at any time, not only when we recite formal prayer but also when we work, eat and drink, walk, and sleep. For example, you

may have felt a special need to pray personally every Sunday or every day and practiced it to become one with God and reflect on the words of Jesus in the Gospel during these three months without joining communal Masses. Or many of you surely had longer sleeping time on workdays. You also may feel grateful to God that many workplaces haven't been closed and many employees are getting paid normally.

On the other hand, the devil may have reaped a good harvest for his reign. He may have succeeded in lulling you into spiritual lukewarmness, or making you believe that the inner life in unity with God is not necessary, which has led you to blame the suspension of public Masses for unplugging a cable from God instead of getting charged by the energy to feed your faith life. It is important for us to hear again the words of caution and warning that the Spirit of Jesus the Risen gave to the church in Laodicea. It will surely help us: "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:15-16)

The story told in the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-13 by Luke

This passage describes the most important event in the Acts of the Apostles: The descent of the Holy Spirit, or the birth of the Church. Although written two thousand years ago, it still remains fresh and real. This is not just a narrative of the past event. We can read it not simply as "the first coming of the Holy Spirit" but as a model of how the Holy Spirit can be poured out on people and our communities today to work among us.

First, Luke points out that the first descent of the Holy Spirit fell on a significant day to the Jews: It was the 50th day, seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus. "Pentecostes", meaning "fiftieth" in Greek, was a feast to remember the covenant that God made with the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. This is Luke's first message: The coming of the Holy Spirit will start a new covenant between God and all the people on earth. Luke then introduces the first stage of the story to go on: The community had been gathering at a house with Mary, the mother of Jesus, for nine days. It is where the Holy Spirit came and seized all of them.

How can this special event be described? Luke makes use of a traditional imagery to depict the manifestation of God in the Old Testament: The sound like a rushing wind that echoed through the whole house. The Greek words "wind" and "spirit" share the same word origin. And "divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested

on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages....”(Acts 2:3-4)

Next, the stage changes. The Holy Spirit appears before the crowd who had gathered to hear this sound. The people from various nations are amazed to hear the disciples speaking in their own native languages.

Luke's emphasis on the crowd “from every nation under the heaven” indicates that the Gospel is open to all nations and all cultures. Faith is one, but the gospel of Jesus must be incarnated with respect to different cultures. If necessary, the gospel will purify a culture and make it better. Luke continues this story sarcastically: Some people testify that the disciples are drunk as they speak. It's true that Christianity was born out of Jesus' disciples proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God. This spiritual work was realized by the Holy Spirit who calls a large group of men and women to conversion and makes them living witnesses to Jesus the Risen. Let us pray repeatedly as follows so that we too can live as Christians with the same zeal in today's society:

“Come, Holy Spirit, enkindle in our hearts the fire of your love!”

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE).