

Pentecost (May 24): Acts. 2:1-11; I Cor. 12:3b-7, 12-13; Jn 20:19-23

1) "Lower your bucket-- taste and see": More than a century ago, a great sailing ship was stranded off the coast of South America. Week after week the ship lay there in the still waters with not a hint of a breeze. The captain was desperate; the crew was dying of thirst. And then, on the far horizon, a steamship appeared, headed directly toward them. As it drew near, the captain called out, "We need water! Give us water!" The steamship replied, "Lower your buckets where you are." The captain was furious at this cavalier response but called out again, "Please, give us water." But the steamer gave the same reply, "Lower your buckets where you are!" And with that they sailed away! The captain was beside himself with anger and despair, and he went below. But a little later, when no one was looking, a yeoman lowered a bucket into the sea and then tasted what he brought up: It was perfectly sweet, fresh water! For you see, the ship was just out of sight of the mouth of the Amazon. And for all those weeks they had been sitting right on top of all the fresh water they needed! What we are really seeking is already inside us, waiting to be discovered, waiting to be embraced: the Holy Spirit of God Who has been living within us from the moment of our Baptism. The Holy Spirit is saying to us at this very moment from deep in our heart, "Lower your buckets where you are. Taste and see!" Come, Holy Spirit! Fill our hearts, and set us on fire! Amen.

2) "Well, Chippie doesn't sing much anymore." It happened in Galveston, TX. A woman was cleaning the bottom of the cage of her parrot Chippie with the canister vacuum cleaner. She was not using an attachment on the tube. When the telephone rang, she turned her head to pick it up, continuing to vacuum the cage as she said, "Hello," into the phone. Then she heard the horrible noise of Chippie being sucked into the vacuum. Immediately she put down the phone, ripped open the vacuum bag, and found Chippie in there, stunned but still alive. Since the bird was covered with dust and dirt, she grabbed it, ran it into the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held the bird under the water to clean it off. When she finished that, she saw the hair dryer on the bathroom sink. She turned it on and held the bird in front of the blast of hot air to dry him off. A few weeks later, a reporter from the newspaper that originally published the story went out to the house to ask the woman, "How's Chippie doing now?" She said, "He just sort of sits and stares." Today's Gospel tells us that it was what happened to the apostles. They all were traumatized by the arrest and crucifixion of their master and bewildered by his post-Resurrection appearances and his command to prepare for the coming of his Holy Spirit. Many of us can identify with Chippie and the apostles. Life has sucked us up, thrown cold water on us, and blown us away. Somewhere in the trauma, we have lost our song. Hence, we, too, need the daily anointing of the Holy Spirit to keep us singing songs of Christian witnessing through agápe love.

http://www.biblestudyresources.com/devotionals/jesus/he_keeps_me_singing.htm

3: Treasure within: An old beggar lay on his deathbed. His last words were to his youngest son who had been his constant companion during his begging trips. "Dear son," he said, "I have nothing to give you except a cotton bag and a dirty bronze bowl which I got in my younger days from the junk yard of a rich lady." After his father's death, the boy continued begging, using the bowl his father had given him. One day a gold merchant dropped a coin in the boy's bowl and he was surprised to hear a familiar clinking sound. "Let me check your bowl," the merchant said. To his great surprise, he found that the beggar's bowl was made of pure gold. "My dear young man," he said, "why do you waste your time begging? You are a rich man. That bowl of yours is worth at least thirty thousand dollars." We Christians are often like this beggar boy who failed to recognize and appreciate the value of his bowl. We fail to appreciate the infinite worth of the Holy Spirit living within each of us, sharing His gifts and fruits and charisms with us. On this major feast day, we are invited to experience and appreciate the transforming, sanctifying and strengthening presence of the Holy Spirit within us. This is also a day to renew the promises made to God during our Baptism and Confirmation, to profess our Faith, and to practice it.

Introduction: The Jewish Pentecost: Both the Jews and the Christians now celebrate Pentecost. Along with the Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, Pentecost was one of the major feasts of the Jews. During these three great Jewish festivals, every male Jew living within twenty miles of Jerusalem was legally bound to go to Jerusalem to participate in the feast. The word Pentecost is Greek for "pentecostes" which means "fiftieth." The feast received this name because it was celebrated fifty days after the Feast of the Passover. Another name for the Jewish Pentecost is Shebuot or "The Feast of Weeks (the "week" of seven Sabbaths between Passover and Pentecost)." It was originally a day of thanksgiving for the completion of the harvest. During Passover, the first omer (a Hebrew measure of about a bushel), of barley was offered to God. At Pentecost, two loaves of bread were offered in gratitude for the harvest. Later, the Jews added to the Feast of Pentecost the element of Yahweh's Covenant with Noah which took place fifty days after the great deluge. Still later, they made this feast an occasion to thank God for His Sinaitic Covenant with Moses which occurred fifty days after the beginning of the Exodus from Egypt.

The Christian Pentecost: Pentecost Sunday is one of the most ancient feasts of the Church, celebrated early enough to be mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (20:16) and St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (16:8). Pentecost marks the end and the goal of the Easter season. For Christians, it is a memorial of the day the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and the Virgin Mary in the form of fiery tongues, an event that took place fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus. The Paschal mystery of the Passion, the Death, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of Jesus culminates in the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father at the request of His Son on Jesus' disciples. The feast also commemorates the official inauguration of the Christian Church by the apostolic preaching of St. Peter which resulted in the conversion of 3000 Jews to the Christian faith. Pentecost is, thus, the official birthday of the Church. But years ago, This Rock Magazine reported that there were at that time 34,000 Protestant denominations which means that, on the average,

more than sixty-nine new denominations had sprung up every year since the Reformation began in 1517. So whose birthday is it anyway? You could say, Pentecost is the birthday of the Church Jesus established nearly 2,000 years ago. Today's Scripture readings remind us that Pentecost is an event of both the past and the present. The main theme of today's readings is that the gift of the Holy Spirit is something to be shared with others. In other words, the readings remind us that the gift of the Holy Spirit moves its recipients to action and inspires them to share this gift with others.

The first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:1-11), describes in detail the miraculous transformation that took place during the first Pentecost, thus fulfilling Jesus' promise to his apostles. There was first "a noise like a strong driving wind." Then there were "tongues as of fire" resting on the disciples, and each of them was filled with the Holy Spirit. The first manifestation of their reception of the Holy Spirit came when the apostles began to proclaim the Good News of Jesus, and everyone there (regardless of their many different native languages), was able to understand them "in his own tongue." The Jews in the crowds came from sixteen different geographical regions. The miracle of tongues on Pentecost thus reverses the confusion of tongues wrought by God at the Tower of Babel, as described in Genesis 11. Later, the Acts of the Apostles describes how the Holy Spirit empowered the early Christians to bear witness to Christ by their sharing love and strong faith. This "anointing by the Holy Spirit" also strengthened the early Christian martyrs during the period of brutal persecution that followed.

In the second reading (I Cor 12:3-7, 12-13) St. Paul explains how the sharing of the various spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit enriches the Church. He refers to the varieties of gifts given to the Church as coming from the same Spirit Who activates all of them in Christians for the common good. They are described as the gifts, fruits and charisms of the Spirit. They may take different forms like prophecy, teaching, administration, acts of charity, healing and speaking in tongues, and they may reside in different persons like apostles, prophets, teachers, healers and so on. Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit in his Letter to the Galatians "What the Spirit brings is ... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control" (5:22). He continues, "Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit" (5:25). Paul insists that these spiritual gifts are to be used in the present time for the benefit of others, for the common good and for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Today's Gospel relates how the risen Jesus gave his apostles a foretaste of Pentecost on the evening of Easter Sunday by appearing to them and inviting them to carry on the mission given him by his Heavenly Father. He then empowered them to do so by breathing upon them and saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." On the day of Pentecost, Jesus fulfilled his promise to send the Advocate or Paraclete. The gift of the Spirit would enable them to fulfill Jesus' commission to preach the Gospel to all nations as well. Today's Gospel passage also tells us how Jesus gave to the Apostles the power and authority to forgive sins. "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained." These wonderful words which bind together inseparably the presence of the Holy Spirit and the gift of forgiveness are referred to

directly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. But they have a much wider meaning. Those words indicate the power we are all given of being the agents of forgiveness in the world of today, which is often fiercely judgmental and vengeful.

Exegetical notes: Role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and of the Church: How beautiful is the thought that the Holy Spirit lives within us! Saint Paul reminds the Corinthian community of this fact when he asks, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (I Corinthians 3:16). It is the Holy Spirit who develops our intimacy with God. "God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, 'Abba!' ('Father!')" (Gal 4:6). "God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:3). Moreover, we know that it is the Holy Spirit Who teaches us to pray (Romans 8:26). By the power of the Spirit, we also know the Lord Jesus through his Church. Pentecost Sunday is the birth date of the Church. It is the Holy Spirit who enlivens, enlightens, guides, and sanctifies the Church. The Psalm refrain for this Sunday says it so well, "Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth." We know Jesus through the Sacramental Mysteries of the Church, and Holy Spirit is at the heart of the Sacramental life of the Church. Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders are the Sacramental Mysteries through which people receive the seal of the Holy Spirit. It would be impossible for us to receive Jesus in the Eucharist without the descent of the Holy Spirit at the Epiclesis of the Divine Liturgy. Even the forgiveness of sins comes through the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-23). The Holy Spirit both confirmed the apostles in Holy Orders as priests and empowered them to forgive sins by His power, a work which He continues today in each of our priests.

The action of the Holy Spirit in the daily lives of Christians: The Spirit is that Paraclete (a Greek word that is translated as Counselor, Comforter, Helper, Encourager, or Enabler), Who quietly works in us and through us every day behind the scenes in the basic activities of our lives and the lives of the people around us. He is there in all his fullness wherever people worship and pray in the name of Jesus. When we believe and trust in Jesus, we have that Faith through the Holy Spirit working in us and filling us. The Holy Spirit leads us to turn away from our sinfulness. Further, He reassures us that we are still loved in spite of our sin and that Jesus died on a cross for just those moments when we rebel against God's way. He confronts us and urges us to take a good look at ourselves and where we are heading, to make a U-turn, to leave the old behind and try something new. He's not afraid to challenge us and stretch us to go and do things for Christ - things we have never done before or ever imagined ourselves doing. He's the One who says to us, "Stop being so self-focussed. Stop looking into yourself all the time and being depressed by what you see, or fool yourself into thinking that what you see in yourself is enough to get you through! Look up, look away, look to Jesus and let him turn your around; let him take control!"

The Holy Spirit, the Helper is quietly at work: in the sincere concern of a friend for our health; in the generosity of those who give us so much help; in the inner strength we discover in times of crisis; in those moments when we admit that we have been wrong; in making a tough choice; in the resilience

of people who face one bad thing after another; in times when we have dared to love even though it was hard to do so. The Holy Spirit, the Helper is quietly at work: in our taking on responsibilities that we once thought beyond us; in our refusing to let the greed of society take over our soul; in our giving thanks always even though times have been hard; in our rising above past failures and putting past hurts behind us; in our finding a central core of peace in the midst of turmoil; in an adult patiently teaching a child self-esteem and self-control; in the person sitting quietly beside a hospital bed; in a parent praying for a troubled son or daughter. The Spirit calls us to repentance, to turn our lives around; He calls us to Faith and to take up our cross and follow Jesus. However we look at the Holy Spirit, He is always our Helper, always helping us to be what God made us to be. He helps us to be truly great, namely, to be servants to one another. Likewise the Spirit promotes Jesus in our lives; He gathers us around the cross of Jesus; He changes our lives, helping us to be more patient and forgiving, to seek new beginnings in our relationships with one another and to let the power of God's love have the final say over the conflicts we get into. He is available to us every moment of every day as we face the choices between self-centeredness or being the God-centered people the Spirit has called us to be in Christ. (Adapted from Vince-reflections).

Life messages: 1) We need to permit the Holy Spirit to direct our lives: a) By constantly remembering and appreciating His Holy Presence within us, especially through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. b) By fortifying ourselves with the help of the Spirit against all types of temptations. c) By seeking the assistance of the Spirit in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and in the breaking of our evil habits. d) By listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us through the Bible and through the good counsel of others e) By fervently praying for the gifts, fruits and charisms of the Holy Spirit. f) By renewing our lives through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. g) By living our lives in the Holy Spirit as lives of commitment, of sacrifice, and of joy. We are called to love as Jesus loved, not counting the cost. As Saint Paul exhorts us, "Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16, 25).

2) We need to cultivate the spirit of forgiveness. The feast of the Pentecost offers us the chance to look at the role which forgiveness should play in our dealings with others. Thus, we are challenged to examine our sense of compassion, patience, tolerance and magnanimity. Learning to forgive is a lifelong task, but the Holy Spirit is with us to make us agents of forgiveness. If we are prepared on this day of Pentecost to receive the Holy Spirit into our lives, we can have confidence that our lives will be marked by the Spirit of forgiveness.

3) We need to observe Pentecost every day. "It will always be Pentecost in the Church," affirmed Blessed Oscar Romero, Archbishop of El Salvador, on Pentecost Sunday 1978, "provided the Church lets the beauty of the Holy Spirit shine forth from her countenance. When the Church ceases to let her strength rest on the Power from above which Christ promised her and which he gave her on that day, and when the Church leans rather on the weak forces of the power or wealth of this earth, then the Church ceases to be newsworthy. The Church will be fair to see, perennially young, attractive in

every age, as long as she is faithful to the Spirit that floods her and she reflects that Spirit through her communities, through her pastors, through her very life" (The Violence of Love, The Plough Pub. Co., Farmington, PA: 1998). Archbishop Romero's declaration reminds us -- as does today's Gospel -- that Pentecost is not just one day, but every day. Without breath, there is no life. Without the Spirit, the Church is a field of dry, dead bones. Fulton J. Sheen once said about the Church, "Even though we are God's chosen people, we often behave more like God's frozen people--frozen in our prayer life, frozen in the way we relate with one another, frozen in the way we celebrate our faith." Today is a great day to ask the Holy Spirit to rekindle in us the spirit of new life and enthusiasm, the fire of God's love. Let us repeat Cardinal Newman's favorite little prayer, "Come Holy Spirit." (Archbishop Romero was beatified by Pope Francis on May 23, 2015).

4) We need to be Spirit-filled Christians: Spirit-filled people acknowledge their weaknesses, ask for the strengthening, anointing and guidance of the Holy Spirit every morning, ask for His forgiveness every evening and pass on that forgiveness to those who sin against them. Spirit-filled people are praying people. Paul encourages us, "Pray on every occasion as the Spirit leads. For this reason keep alert and never give up; pray for all God's people" (Eph 6:18). They are praying and worshipping God in their families and parishes. They try to grow continually in their Faith, and they seek out every opportunity to discover Christ and what it means to be children of God. Spirit-filled people are people who allow the Spirit to change their lives through their daily reading of the Bible and the frequenting of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist. Spirit-filled people speak words that heal, restore, make people happy and build people up instead of tearing them down. Spirit-filled people pass on the love of God to the people living around them by their acts of kindness, mercy and charity. Hence, let us pray for a spirit of love instead of hate, a spirit of helpfulness instead of non-cooperation, a spirit of generosity instead of greed and a spirit of gentleness instead of ruthlessness.

"Come Holy Spirit

Make our ears to hear

Make our eyes to see

Make our mouths to speak

Make our hearts to seek

Make our hands to reach out

And touch the world with your love. AMEN."

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