

Homily - Pentecost Sunday - May 31, 2020

By Deacon Steve Livingston

Good morning. Donna and I miss you all very much and look forward to the day when we can once more worship and share Eucharist with you in person. Meanwhile, Fr. Paul has encouraged me to share this reflection from my home. It is my privilege to do so.

Last Sunday ... on the Feast of the Ascension ... we heard Jesus give his apostles their mission ... to preach the Good News ... in His name ... to all nations. They had heard everything Jesus had taught them and ... even though if they didn't really understand ... He had laid to rest all their doubts ... so now ... they were almost ready. They knew **what** they were to do but they had not a clue ... **how** to go about doing it.

We know that four of them were fishermen and one was a tax collector. We can assume the others were from similar walks of life. They were not well educated and ... they had already demonstrated ... when Jesus was arrested ... that they were not particularly courageous. The task ahead of them was bewildering and daunting. So ... as Jesus had asked ... they prayed and waited ... for this promised **Baptism** ... of the Holy Spirit. And so **waiting** ... they came together ... to celebrate (Sha-**vu'**-os) Shavuot.

Sha-**vu'**-os was the feast celebrated fifty days after Passover to commemorate the covenant between Yahweh and His people ... the receiving of Torah ... the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. To the Jewish people these commandments were the very seeds of life! At Passover they gained their freedom to live, at Sha-**vu'**-os they learned to live as God **intends** ... man to live. Sha-**vu'**-os is also called Pentecost.

And as they were celebrating this sacred feast ... God ...as always ... with impeccable timing ... sent His Holy Spirit to them. The Holy Spirit reinforced whatever **was** best in them ... perhaps piety and fear of the Lord ... and provided whatever was **lacking** in them ... perhaps wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude and knowledge ... and one thing more ... the precious gift of being **truly** understood ... by all who heard them.

So this, then, was the day that the apostles began the sacred mission that Jesus had given them to bring God's Word to the World. This Sha-**vu'**-os or ... **Pentecost** was the day that a little group of ordinary, unlettered, confused and frightened men suddenly understood all that Jesus had told them. This was the day they became eloquent, courageous and **extraordinary**. This was the day they became ... **Church**.

We are told three-thousand people joined this infant Church that very first day ... all things considered ... a pretty **auspicious** beginning.

Remember ... this new-born religion ... had a God ... who had been executed as a **criminal** ... **condemned** by the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman authorities as well. His followers could hardly expect better. One could hardly suspect that **this** baby would survive infancy ... let alone look forward to celebrating it's two-thousandth birthday. And yet ... here we are!

Oh ... of course ... all is not rosy! Our Church has problems! Things need addressing! I've heard lots of people saying all the things they think are wrong ... that our Holy Father should **fix** and ... my heart **truly** goes out to Pope Francis. No ... our Church has problems. It always will. ... And you know what? It always has. If you don't believe **that** ... just pick up your Bible and read Paul's letters.

So ... just how **has** this ... very less than perfect Church ... managed to survive ... intact ... for almost two-thousand years ... led by sinners ... in the face of wars ... persecutions ... internal corruption ... scandal ... attacks from without **and** within? And yet ... it stands ... **how**?

Well ... the answer ... of course ... is the Holy Spirit ... that same Holy Spirit ... promised by Jesus ... that descended in tongues of fire upon those very ordinary men who so eloquently preached that day ... and brought our Church into being. This was not a Holy Spirit that was going to give birth to this infant Church and then **abandon** it or **leave** it to its own devices. No ... of course not! The Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church ... has remained with the Church every ... step ... of ... the ... way ... and will remain with the Church for all eternity.

In **this** we can hope ... in **this** we can believe ... because just as Sha-vu'-os ... the old Pentecost ... celebrated the covenant of God's **Law** ... the **New** Pentecost celebrates the covenant of God's **Love** ... and God's **Promise** ... that same dual promise Jesus made just before He ascended ... to be with us always and to send the Holy Spirit.

The **Church** ... is God's gift to us ... the Holy **Spirit** ... is God's gift to the Church! So in spite of whatever **problems** ... the Church may endure ... we can have perfect confidence that what the Church teaches is authentic! Why? Because it is guided by the Holy Spirit ... just **as** ... those unlettered fishermen ... and the others ... were guided almost two-thousand years ago. Without the Holy Spirit ... the Church would **have** no life. Without the Holy Spirit ... there would **be** no Church! ... Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth!