

## **Pentecost Vigil - May 18, 2024**

### **Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski**

During our recent trip to the French Alps to visit our daughter's family, including our three granddaughters—Charlie, Margaux and Zelig—Mary and I traveled through the airport hubs in Amsterdam and Paris. We heard a cacophony of languages being spoken by those around us: French, Dutch, German, Chinese, plus many that I could not even begin to identify. I felt like I was in the midst of the Tower of Babel construction project! I envy those, like Father Paul, who have a knack for languages. The grade of “D-” that I earned in my first semester of high school French many years ago is indicative of my lack of proficiency in foreign languages and French, in particular. (By the way, by any objective measure, that grade of “D-” was extremely generous. I truly believe that my French teacher, who was on a bowling team with my parents, elevated my more deserved grade of “F” to a “D-” just to keep the peace with my parents.) So, I feel right at home in today's first reading where as a result of the hubris of “the whole world,” the Lord scattered the people over the earth by “confus[ing] their speech.

But the Lord didn't just stop there and watch us babel our way through time. He had other plans for our journey through salvation history and that plan included sending his only son, Jesus Christ, who through the Paschal Mystery of his life, death and resurrection saves us from the consequences of sin and re-unites us with God.

Today, on this Pentecost Vigil, we celebrate the culmination of the Paschal Mystery, which is brought to fulfillment by the sending of the Holy Spirit. By sending the Holy Spirit, God initiates a new age in the history of the world—the Age of the Spirit, the “anti-Babel,” if you would.

Even seeing the risen Lord during the forty days after his resurrection was not enough to transform Jesus' followers: Timid, fearful disciples huddled behind locked doors. Only with the descent of the Holy Spirit did Jesus' disciples become bold and confident enough to fulfill Jesus' parting words that we heard on the Ascension last Sunday: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” (Mk16:15)

That same Holy Spirit, which transformed the Apostles and enabled them to boldly proclaim the gospel, is made present with us today in the Church through the sacraments, particularly the Eucharistic Liturgy that we celebrate every Sunday. Through the Eucharist, God brings us peace; not a peace to solve our problems, for God does not spare us, his disciples, from tribulation and persecution. Rather God's Holy Spirit provides us with peace *in* our problems. Given the frenetic pace of life today, it seems that we're each pulled in a thousand different directions. While the world offers a quick fix in many forms—pills (whether prescribed or not) and alcohol; only the Holy Spirit in our hearts can provide us with true peace.

Pope Francis suggests that filled with the peace of the Holy Spirit, our hearts are like a deep sea, which remains peaceful in its depths, even when its surface is swept by waves. Rather than seeking the Holy Spirit, we constantly try to stay afloat on the surface in the tumultuous waves of life; as soon as one problem goes away, another arrives. We grow anxious and ill-at-ease. However, if we allow the Holy Spirit to enter our hearts, the calm of the ocean depths will bring us true peace; peace in the midst of restlessness, confidence in the midst of discouragement, joy in sadness, and courage in an hour of trial.

The Holy Spirit not only brings peace within us but also among us. Today, it seems like the automatic response to one evil is a greater evil. Living under the Code of Hammurabi from antiquity—an eye for an eye—is no way to go through life. Those who live by the Spirit, bring peace where there is discord, respond to arrogance with meekness, malice with goodness, shouting with silence, gossip with prayer, and defeatism with encouragement.

Let us daily—not just at Pentecost—call upon the Holy Spirit to turn our fears into trust, our self-centeredness into self-gift; grant the joy of the resurrection and make us one body, the Church and the world. May we be builders of concord, sowers of goodness and apostles of hope.