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Solemnity of Pentecost

Date: Sunday, May 19, 2024 | **Season:** Easter | **Year:** B
First Reading: Acts 2:1–11
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 104:1, 24, 29–31, 34 | **Response:** Psalm 104:30
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:3b–7, 12–13
Gospel Acclamation: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love
Gospel Reading: John 20:19–23
Preached at: The Cardoner Chapel at Bellarmine House **in the** Archdiocese of Sydney, Australia**.**

Tonight we celebrate Pentecost. The etymology of the word tells us that this is a feast celebrated 50 days after Easter, or on the seventh Sunday after Easter. This in itself is important, that the Church makes Easter longer than Lent. To stress that we live as Christians who are aware of the Resurrection and what we celebrate tonight, the apostles being 'filled with the Holy Spirit', told in the First Reading.

There are lots of symbols we could speak of in this event that takes place at the end of our Easter celebration – symbols like wind, fire, tongues of flame, language and understanding – but perhaps most importantly courage and boldness, or in biblical language, fearlessness.

In case you did not recognize the symbols.

- There was the sound of wind representing the Holy Spirit – pneuma – which is often associated with wind or breath.
- The Tongues of Fire – recalling God speaking to Moses in the burning bush, and how the Israelites were accompanied by God in the desert as a pillar of fire.
- The speaking in tongues – is a sign of one filled with the Spirit
- The Apostles spoke in many languages to people of different tongues – thus emphasizing the inclusive nature of God's Kingdom – and the fearless way they spread the Good News to every people.

Do you recall what I quizzed you on last week, the tower of Babel, – well it is today that the curse at Babel is fully reversed, since all speak and hear with full understanding. Notice how God's message properly proclaimed creates unity –

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not division.

All of this you can see in the Acts of the Apostles.

But in the Gospel we are shown a different picture. We see a fearful group of Apostles on the evening of Easter Sunday, bringing us back to the start of Easter. We are before the resurrection at this moment. It was the fear that just as Jesus died, so the Apostles feared facing death. We're told they've locked the doors because they were so afraid. They have retreated into themselves, forgetting the promises Jesus tried to share with them from the Scripture.

Jesus appears and tells them, "peace be with you". This is not just saying the polite greeting of "Shalom!", Jesus had promised that he would give them a peace like no other. Jesus gives them his peace and shows them his hands and side, and their fear turns into joy, as Jesus gives them – and us – a mission.

Because each of us, having encountered the Risen Lord, is given the same mission – to preach the truth of the resurrection, to build up God's Kingdom in our lives, using the gifts we have been given and with the grace and help of the Holy Spirit. Our mission is important because it involves sharing that Peace of Christ with all we meet. There is the example of the forgiveness of sins, which is of course necessary and helps each of us to be more authentic and credible and help us on our way to God. But Christ's peace is more than that. This morning I walked around the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. It was a secular monument, I thought, to the trauma and healing that is needed for when we forget peace and go to war. No matter how noble and at times necessary war is often painted, we know that everyone suffers in war. As Pope Francis says, it is always a defeat. Christ's peace is not just the absence of war, it is the practice of non-violence and loving of one's neighbour – which is another way of talking about the Other – the outsider – the outcast. Christ could easily have summoned angels to defend him from the Cross, yet he chose to accept death, precisely so that he could return to send God's Spirit. His peace to us and the mission he gives us is not as the world understands it – and this makes building his Kingdom more urgent and more difficult… for sometimes we build the Kingdom in our own image, instead of His. I could talk more about this later if you want, but I think it's always useful on this feast to think of the time in the Church that we are in.

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The worldwide Church is currently listening to the Holy Spirit through this emphasis on synodality. It's listening to the Spirit speak to us, not just through the Bishops, but through each and every person. The first few centuries, as we came to better understand and articulate the Creed, the Church focused very much on God the Father and God the Son, and their relationship with us. But we live in the age of the Holy Spirit, as Vatican II and the experience of change in the Church attests to; and it is only now that we are, I think, focusing on the fact that the Holy Spirit is God with us – with all of us – today. That's incredibly important, because when we pray, we know God will send his spirit to us, to help us pray, and to strengthen and support us. When we pray – we do not have to do anything complicated. We need only speak to the God as a friend, and open our hearts to God's Spirit. That is why we pray today, and on our confirmation, Come Holy Spirit. We believe the Holy Spirit does enter us, so that we need only look inwards and find God with us. God has sent His Spirit to help us in our mission. We are never alone.

We all have exactly the same ultimate goal, to help others and ourselves to God – this common mission is energised from the same Source, but with our different qualities of character and ability, and depending on the environment situation in which we find ourselves, we each aim at that goal in different ways.

Working together in different ways towards a common aim, Paul compares us to a human body in which each part is ordered to the well-being of the whole. That should be a picture of the Christian community. We are all equal in our infinite dignity — Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, cleric or lay, male and female, – but different in calling and manner of service. For we have each been created by love, from love and to love, with different gifts.

On this feast of Pentecost, as we celebrate the formation and the mission of the whole Christian community, we also need to reflect on the particular role that God has for me, to reflect on the particular contribution that I can make to the corporate mission of the Church and of the particular group with which I am involved.

In Bellarmine, that could be how we contribute to the intentional community we are trying to form here. It is a community that is open to everyone, Jew and Greek, men and women, cleric or lay. Hopefully it will be a community that is

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open to each of the gifts you bring to it. Let's pray tonight for the gift of generosity, so that we might share our gifts with one another.

In Ignatian Spirituality and the Christian life we talk of the Good and Bad Spirit. The Good Spirit is the Holy Spirit and the bad spirit is the enemy of the Good Spirit. Allow me to end with 3 pieces of advice and 3 questions.

Firstly, the Good Spirit reminds us to always live in the now. Do not allow yourselves to be paralyzed by the shame of the past or the fear of the future – there lies the bad spirit. Focus instead on the grace of now – for the true gift that the present really is. What good can we do today?

Secondly, the Good Spirit also leads us to look at the bigger picture, the whole. It brings us into union and communion with the community. We are not left to suffer alone, but through the comfort of the Holy Spirit, we discover precisely we are not alone, we are part of a people saved by God and that it is in our diversity and unity that we make up the Body that is the church. And this Church is bigger than we can imagine. The Synod in Rome uses the image of enlarging the space of our tent… because there are no borders. All are welcome. The bad spirit will always try to make victims of us to ourselves, focusing our concern inward instead of outward, into comparisons with others instead of celebrating all that is good in the other.

The third piece of advice from the Good Spirit is, "Put God before yourself" and see everything as gift. In this way we will be alert to and accepting of God's grace. We will realise that it is not our efforts that save us, but God's loving gift of grace to us that truly saves us. When we think we must earn God's love or prove our faithfulness, we have not understood love or fidelity. For one is always faithful to who or what one loves. The bad spirit will always tempt us to see ourselves at the center. We can always ask ourselves, is this thought or action I am contemplating, building up God's Kingdom or my own? And when you need help in seeing the difference, remember God's Spirit will always show you the way.

In closing, just three questions to consider for homework this evening:

1. **The Paraclete**, the Holy Spirit is given to each of us to be our comforter. All of us in difficult moments desire comfort.
   The first question is: To whom or what do we turn when we seek to soothe

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or comfort ourselves?

University can be stressful and we may have noticed in ourselves patterns in our behavior to deal with stress. Some are healthy. Some may not be.

But my question to you tonight is to notice what you are doing when you need comfort, and to suggest turning to the Holy Spirit for comfort next time.

2. **What are we afraid of?**

   (I'm not talking about fear of heights – some fears are just common sense)

   But our fears can often times reveal as much to us as our desires do.

   For example, it was only after I was ordained that I remembered I was afraid of public speaking – and yet, if one leans into one's fears, and uses the courage the Spirit gives us, we can discover we can do more than we can imagine.

   Notice your fears and hear God telling you: "Be not afraid!"

3. **How do we comfort others?**

   For being a man or woman for others is often the antidote we need for our own discomfort.

   Do we notice the needs of others or are we locked up in our own worlds – unaware of those in our community or family?

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