

Today we celebrate the birthday of this Church – the universal church. We celebrate the presence of the Spirit in this believing community today, just as it was present among the community in Jerusalem. Pentecost is the third great Christian festival. On Christmas we celebrated the birth of Christ, our Savior. On Easter we celebrated his victorious resurrection from death. And today we remember Christ's giving of the Holy Spirit.

In the first reading of today we hear that one of the first signs of the descent of the Holy Spirit was that the Good News – was proclaimed in different languages. The same message in different languages! And people of different backgrounds heard the message in their own native language. They were brought together under the umbrella of the one experience of the Risen Lord. One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to bring people together. In the final discourse of Jesus during the last supper, He prayed: “**Father that they may be one**”. That prayer of Jesus is realized today in our believing community by the presence of the Holy Spirit through our own cooperation. This is the miracle of the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church. Do we believe in His presence? A priest was once asked by a doctor why he preached the existence of the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. The doctor asked: “Do you ever see the Holy Spirit? Do you ever hear the Holy Spirit?” The priest answered, “No”. The doctor continued: “Do you ever taste the Holy Spirit? Do you ever smell the Holy Spirit? To all these questions, the doctor received a ‘No’ answer. But when the doctor asked: “Do you ever feel the Holy Spirit?” The priest replied: “Yes, indeed.” “Well,” said the doctor, “There are four of the five senses against you, Father. So, I doubt that there is a Holy Spirit.”

Then it was the turn of the priest to ask. “You are a doctor of medicine,” the priest said. “It is your business to treat pains. Did you ever see, hear, taste or smell a pain?” asked the priest. “No,” answered the doctor. “Did you feel the pain,” followed the priest. “Yes, I did,” said the doctor. “There are four senses against you. Yet you know and I know that there is pain. By the same proof, I know that the Holy Spirit exists,” continued the priest.

Why did Jesus sent the Holy Spirit? After Jesus had told them that he was sending them, he “**breathed on them**.” These words should be familiar. In the book of Genesis, in the story of God forming the first human beings from the dust of the earth, it says he “**breathed into his nostrils the breath of life**” (Genesis 2:7). In Psalm 104, it says that *when you, God, take away creatures' breath, they die and return to dust, but “when you send forth your spirit [or breath!], they are created.”* As Jesus breathed on the disciples, he told them “Receive the Holy Spirit.” “Receive the breath of God.” If we are alive, it is because God’s spirit is in us.

The second role of the spirit is to guide and protect the Church. Traditionally the Church of Christ is compared to a ship sailing in the sea. It is the Spirit that guides the ship to safety. When a large ship enters a harbor, it takes on board what is called a **harbor master**. This is a man who knows that harbor; he knows the length of it, he knows the depth of it. He knows where the

hazards are. He knows where the tides and currents are; what direction they flow in and how strong they are. When that harbor master comes on board, he takes control of that ship, and he gives order to the captain who steers the ship. He is an outside expert who is brought in to make sure that ship docks safely.

As we sail through the sea of life, we have been given a harbor master. He is the Holy Spirit. He knows the currents, the tides, the hazards, and the flow. If you will let Him guide the ship of your life, He will guide you safely through the hazards of earth, right into the harbor of heaven. Because He is the only guide you need.

Thirdly, Jesus says, "**Receive the Holy Spirit. Go and forgive sins.**" Sin is the problem. Forgiveness is the solution. Sin means that we are enemies of God, that things are not right between us, that we have gone astray, that we do not trust the one who made us in the first place. Forgiveness of sins on account of Christ means that while we were God's enemies, God took it upon himself to wipe away our wrongdoings and our guilt and make us friends. Forgiveness of sins means that God seeks the lost, welcomes back the prodigal, binds up the poor and brokenhearted. Jesus sends his followers with the gift of the Holy Spirit to save the world by forgiving sins.

"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." God acts now through those who follow Jesus: we must pronounce the words of forgiveness if people are to be forgiven. And if we do not do so, if we retain the sins of some, those people will not be forgiven. It is the Spirit that forgives our sins.

Have you listened to the prayer of absolution at confession? The words of the absolution are: "**God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit.**" This, I believe, is a perfect picture of the peace that comes from Christ's Spirit. The waves of worry, of fear, of heartbreak, cannot touch those resting in Christ. Sheltered by His grace and encouraged by His Spirit, the believer is given the perfect tranquility that only Christ can provide.

Pentecost, then, isn't simply an interesting event that occurred two thousand years ago. It is, rather, a continuing event that comes to us down through the centuries in our Church, a Church filled with humans such as ourselves, capable of shameless deeds as well as deeds of glory. If our Church was merely a human invention, something created and sustained by weak men and women, then it would have disappeared long ago. But as it is, filled with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ on earth, bids us today to seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that we can be the persons God dreams we can be.

God bless.