

Homily for Whitsunday 6/8/25

Epistle

Acts 2: 1-11

¹And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

²And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

³And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

⁶Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

⁷And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

⁸And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

⁹Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

¹⁰Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

¹¹Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

Gospel

John 14:15-31

¹⁵If ye love me, keep my commandments.

¹⁶And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever;

¹⁷Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

¹⁸I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

¹⁹Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

²⁰ At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

²¹ He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

²² Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

²³ Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

²⁴ He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

²⁵ These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

²⁶ But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

²⁷ Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

²⁸ Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

²⁹ And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

³⁰ Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

³¹ But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

Introduction

On Sept. 11, 2001, Ron DiFrancesco thought he was going to die. Trapped in the South Tower of the World Trade Center, he had first followed others upstairs to escape the smoke and flames, then decided to turn around and go down, only to find his path blocked by a wall of fire. DiFrancesco was trapped and terrified. Suddenly, he heard a soft voice encouraging him to “get up” and walk through the flames. He was scared and instinct told him to walk away from the fire, but the reassuring voice kept directing him to walk forward. Though he didn’t know it, DiFrancesco had begun to experience what would later be called “Third Man Syndrome.” By following this voice, DiFrancesco found the courage to make it out of the building. In fact, he was the last person to make it out of the South Tower alive before it collapsed.

Third Man Syndrome is a documented phenomenon where individuals in extreme situations report feeling the presence of an unseen companion that provides comfort and guidance. This term, Third Man Syndrome, was popularized by explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, who described experiencing an unseen presence that offered comfort and reassurance during his perilous Antarctic expedition in 1916.

In recent years, well-known adventurers like climber Reinhold Messner and polar explorers Peter Hillary and Ann Bancroft have reported experiencing this phenomenon. An exhaustive study found that these experiences were not uncommon and were found in a wide range of experiences including cases involving mountain climbers, sailors, shipwreck survivors, those in car accidents, house fires and other life and death situations. Many of these accounts have similar characteristics; a voice or presence keeping them calm, comforting them, guiding them and providing a feeling of wellbeing and assurance. Curiously, this “presence” has often been felt by multiple people at once.

Depending on your world view and your faith, this phenomenon could be explained in a variety of ways. Modern science tries to explain this phenomenon as an internal coping mechanism triggered by the brain in response to extreme stress and isolation. Scientists suggest it is our own mind that can serve to provide emotional support and motivation during life-threatening situations. Some researchers believe that this experience could possibly be linked to neurochemical reactions in the brain, such as the release of adrenaline, which they claim might contribute to these experiences.

As Christians, however, we would offer another explanation for such events. We know from the biblical text that God extends His common grace to all people. *“For He makes His sun rise on the evil, and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust”* (Matt. 5:45). Yes, God works miracles in the lives of those who believe, and those who do not, but the presence of the Holy Spirit, God, who abides in us isn’t a hallucination or biochemical reaction, but a real divine reality. The Holy Spirit dwells inside every Christian. Paul tells the Corinth church that the body of faithful Christians is His temple. *“Do you not know that you are God’s temple, and that God’s spirit dwells in you?”* (1 Cor. 3:16). In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul says, *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope”* (Rom. 15:13). The Holy Spirit is described as a counselor or helper to man. The 'Fruit of the Spirit' (the result of His work) is *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”* (Gal. 5:22). The Holy Spirit is often described as the active presence of God in the world and in the lives of believers. In the Christian tradition, the Holy Spirit is associated with various roles and functions, including comforter, advocate, helper, teacher, guide, opening our eyes to sinful behavior, and empowering people with spiritual gifts to accomplish God’s will.

While the phenomenon of Third Man Syndrome is often approached from a scientific or psychological perspective, and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit from a theological one, but the truth is clearly evident. Third Man Syndrome describes the profound impact of a powerful, caring presence that offers guidance, comfort and the ability to do things that may seem beyond our human capacity. For a person of faith this demonstrates the active, personal presence of God. This phenomenon offers a glimpse into a profound reality, that in our deepest needs, our most trying times, we have a shared human experience of finding strength and solace in something beyond ourselves.

As we celebrate Whitsunday, the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit, we are reminded in our gospel message today that we have:

“The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

Body

(John 14: 15-20 Jesus tell His disciples to obey His commandments and that when he departs, he shall send the Holy Spirit to guide them.)

Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus, our Lord and our God, demonstrated His love for His disciples by humbly kneeling down to wash their feet. At this point Jesus tells them that *“if you love me, you will obey my commandments.”* (v.15) As Christians today, it is important to keep the commandments of God, through His grace along with personal discipline and focus.

One of the ways we can show our love for Him is by obediently keeping His commandments. Disobedience is not only a failure of performance or a failure of strength, but in

some sense, it is also a failure of love. Those who love God will obey Him most joyfully and naturally. To say, “I really love Jesus, but I just do not want Him to tell me how to live my life” is a terrible misunderstanding of both Jesus and what loving Him is all about. Jesus also spoke to the proper source of our obedience. It is not fear, pride, or desire to earn His blessing or favor, instead, obedience comes from our love for Christ. Noted theologian, Charles Spurgeon put it this way. “Obedience must have love for its mother, nurse, and food. The essence of obedience lies in the hearty love which prompts the deed rather than in the deed itself.”

Jesus knows how difficult it is for our fallen nature to obey and keep His commandments. The disciples were troubled and anxious when they considered continuing on without Him. Jesus reassures them by saying, “*I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.*” (v. 18). In other words, they would not have less help; they would have more help because the Father would send another Helper. Jesus understood that His disciples (both those with Him on that evening and those across the centuries) would need God’s grace, presence and power to keep His commandments. God the Son promised to pray to God the Father and ask for the giving of God the Holy Spirit to the believer to accomplish this. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would fulfill just that role for us, being sent to empower and help the believer.

Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as, “*The Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you*”. (v.17) He spoke of three aspects of a disciple’s relationship to the Holy Spirit.

- In contrast to the world, the disciple of Jesus will know the Holy Spirit.
- In contrast to the world, the disciple of Jesus will have the Holy Spirit **with** them.

- In contrast to the world, the disciple of Jesus will have the Holy Spirit **in** them.

(John 14: 21-35 Jesus reiterates to Judas, not Iscariot, how He will manifest Himself to the world. As He departs, he gives the gift of the Holy Spirit and His peace.)

As He departed, Jesus reassured His disciples that He would be revealed to and remain among them through love, obedience, and union with the Father and Son, a real-life union with God lived out in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Consider the words of peace our Lord said to His disciples:

“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace, I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (v.25-27)

The Holy Spirit is an important figure throughout the Bible. From beginning to end, the Holy Spirit has always been active: In the beginning, *“The earth was without form and void, and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.”* (Gen1:2) and at the end, tending to us and being the presence of God in our lives. The Spirit of God comforts us, helps us, guides us, reminds us, teaches us, comes along side us, counsels us, and intercedes and advocates for us. There is no area of life in which the believer does not need the help of the Holy Spirit. "Without a life full of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to build the body of Christ."¹

¹ Pastor Luis Ángel Díaz-Pabón, “Who is the Holy Spirit?” 2024.

Action

Again, Jesus speaks to His disciples, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). He is preparing them to go out into the world and teach people what Jesus has taught them. On this Whitsunday or Pentecost, we have a new beginning as well. We can remember what Christ Jesus taught us and we can seek to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. We can strive to keep His commandments and in doing so, we can truly love God and our neighbors as we love ourselves.

It is not easy to follow the Commandments to love one another. It is simple, but it is not easy, because so often people seem to default toward finding reasons not to love. Fortunately, this is the beauty of Pentecost. Yes, there was the miraculous moment in our reading from Acts of the Apostles of the multitude hearing the Gospel in their own tongues, but more importantly, for the long term of the Church, this is when God’s Spirit began indwelling every Christian. When love becomes hard or keeping the commandments is difficult, we can reach out to the Spirit, and we can rely on God and His guidance in our lives.

Conclusion

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the guidance from God, and the furthering of the kingdom of God is hastened through doing acts of love. And as we know from the summary of the law, the commandments of God are all about love for God and love for our neighbor.

On Pentecost, as the Holy Ghost descends on the early Church, we behold the revelation of the Trinity. God the Father created us, God the Son redeemed us, and God the Holy Spirit indwells us. The Holy Spirit is our guide, He is God’s power in action, a power that God, working in us, uses to accomplish His will. He brings conviction to the unbeliever, unites the

believer with Christ and strengthens the Body of Christ. Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Romans that even in our prayers the Spirit is at work in us.

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26).

As we enter the week and build up to Trinity Sunday, let us remember to let the Spirit guide us, help us to keep His commandments and to love each other as Christ taught us. When we find ourselves in difficult, seemingly hopeless, situations we can be assured the Holy Spirit is there to comfort us and guide us. Christians are promised by our Lord of God’s abiding presence, His comfort and guidance through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. What we celebrate today is entirely unique to the baptized child of God and offers comfort that conquers the troubles of the world. May we be at peace knowing that we can trust the Holy Spirit to guide us forward, and help us serve and please God, leading to a new life following His commandments, and walking in His Holy ways.

To the only wise God, Be glory, majesty, dominion and power, Now and Forever,

Amen.