

Good morning, and a Blessed Pentecost to you today! Did you notice those red pennants outside, as you came in today? I hope it got you in a Pentecost mood. All those of you who wore red today, thank you! And the stirring music, the incense! It's a wonderful feast; it's meant to rouse our hearts. Is there anything not to love about Pentecost?

Well, actually, there is. There is something we should look at. Because before we get to hear the rush of Spirit as that wild, unexplainable wind blowing through the room where the disciples are gathered... before we get to feel the passion of the Spirit as fire parting and emblazoning its touch on every one of those gathered... before we join the apostles as they emerge from their gathering place, changed people, filled with spirit and enthusiasm so bold and contagious ... we really need to confront the temptation of living behind the closed doors.

In the Gospel, when Jesus appears to the apostles for the first time, on Resurrection evening, those doors are even locked – bolted shut for fear of the Jews. In our First Reading, which takes place after the Ascension, they were again gathered in that same place, where they had been earnestly praying with Mary and others, for days; because even though they had all experienced the real presence of the living, resurrected Jesus, they gathered together, behind those closed doors, because they really had no idea what they were supposed to do next.

Probably everyone here can relate to that experience. Maybe we have never gone literally “into hiding,” behind locked doors, but we all know what it is like to be afraid. Some of us have even experienced what it is like to face a mortal threat. It might be when we are facing death; or, it might be when we are looking at evil, right up front and personal. Perhaps we most commonly experience fear when we're facing the unknown, when we're facing our inadequacies, our limitations, especially even our faults, and then sometimes we find ourselves ashamed of ourselves and are afraid others will find out. Fear is a common denominator of the human race, we're all touched by it. With most of us, it might not be very obvious – but for most of us fear is a fact woven into the tapestry of our lives. And how we deal with our fears plays a large part in the quality of our living.

It's important to recognize that the apostles' fear was rooted in solid realities. The world they were living in was a dangerous world: Jesus their Lord and Master had been crucified, and they were his closest followers. The Jewish hierarchy had just routed them; their Roman oppressors had demonstrated that they were not going to put up with civil disturbance. And of course, on top of all that, they were still just common people... fishermen, and the like.

So we too also live in a dangerous world, in different ways of course. The same prejudice, greed, hatred, and cruelty that nailed Jesus to the cross are still very much a part of our modern scene. We live in a world that is violent; we live in a society that is materialistic and hedonistic, with a huge gap between the most wealthy and the rest of our citizens, that is growing ever larger. We here today at St. Bridget are largely fortunate to have found places of peace, and for many of us even prosperity in our jobs, our neighborhoods, our church... but there are refugees all over the globe, fleeing violence, persecution, and poverty, a high percentage of them Christian. Internationally, there is economic, political, and religious unrest. Nations have armed themselves against nation, our own nation more than all the rest. And at level of daily life, every day it seems you read about a parent who does something awful to a child; or one spouse to another; or one young person to a random sampling of classmates. Danger in our world is not an illusion, nor is fear. Those disciples who sought safety and comfort by huddling together behind closed doors had good reason to be afraid, and sometimes so do we.

But the reason we celebrate today is because the story doesn't end there, behind closed doors. Those frightened disciples were visited by the risen Christ, and with his help and the gift of the Holy Spirit they overcame their fears, no longer cowering but instead proclaiming the good news. The transformation is remarkable – the same people, in the same world. The dangers were still there and very real. But the fear was gone, or at least it was under control. They were controlling it, instead of it controlling them. What happened to change them?

It seems that there were two factors involved in overcoming those fears. The first was a change in their focus. Jesus said to them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” That put everything in a totally different light. Up to that point, their chief concern had been survival – and that's why they were hiding. They were all afraid that the Jews would do to them what they had done to Jesus. And that possibility did exist and continued to exist – in fact, many of them eventually died a martyr's death. But their fear no longer mattered; their focus had shifted.

My friends, if our main business in this life is our own personal survival and comfort, and that of those we love, then we have very good reason to be afraid, because we are hooked up with a losing cause -- that purpose is bound to fail! I hate to say that, but it's true. We might spend a fortune trying to make everyone safe, walling out crime and violence, or poverty, whatever terrors might trouble us. But if violence or accident or disease doesn't get us, then old age will. There is a bigger and better reason for living than to simply stay alive and find our comforts where we can until we die... and Jesus offers that -- His Way, His Truth, and His Life -- to all of us... whatever our age; whether we're healthy or not, or wealthy or not; and even though we are sinners. Jesus sends us forth just as he did the first apostles, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” sending us on a mission to *spread his love by showing others his love*, and that's a mission worth living for and even dying for.

And secondly, of course, once their focus was changed, no longer fixed on their own lives, Jesus gave them the resources necessary for carrying out that mission. This is what we celebrate so lavishly today! Jesus breathed on them and said “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The wind and fire and electricity of the Holy Spirit came upon them all. And though the signs of the Spirit's presence may not seem so dramatic today, that very same Spirit *is* given to us, with all its power, with all its many gifts. And we are still commissioned to do what Jesus asked, when he left this earth – to go and make disciples of all the peoples -- disciples who will help us renew the face of the earth.

You may say, this sounds like a daunting task. But my friends, *WE ARE* the CHURCH; so, we need to act like it. We must; because we are entrusted with this sacred task of renewal, of spreading his love by showing his love. It is our time; it is our turn. And we don't want to live our faith huddled behind closed doors.

We are not on this journey alone, by ourselves. God is with us; the Holy Spirit is given to us. And we have companions too, do we not? Should we not be able to work with our brothers and sisters, here and beyond these walls, to do whatever is necessary? And what's even more, we are given food for the journey ahead – a most sacred meal which we will once again share this morning.

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