

Pentecost Sunday, Cycle A

Acts 2:1-11; 1Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; and John 20:19-23

My students finish the semester doing three of the corporal works of mercy. This year, many of their planned works were replaced with reflections on past service projects, but some students invented new works within the CDC guidelines. One student held an Easter egg hunt for two boys who have autism. The one, who is nonverbal, shouted for joy as he ran around the field. Another student brings her grandmother groceries weekly and visits outside. She also coaxed her father to hold a concert from their porch. The neighbors spaced themselves around the lawn, street and sidewalks, while she and her dad sang for them. Once again, God is using the pandemic to open opportunities for us to create good. That, simply put, is the message of Pentecost.

So many people are focused on what we have lost and longing for what we had. They want to return to normal. Many people have told me how hungry they are for the Eucharistic bread. Protesters claim that restrictions impinge on their freedoms to earn a living and do what they want. This sounds like the disciples in the wake of the resurrection and ascension: they hid and waited in the upper room. Were they also longing for what they had, when Jesus did and said amazing things, while they tagged along? They seem short on ideas and long on fear and paralysis.

On Easter night, Jesus "came and stood in their midst." Whether we can eat the Eucharistic bread or not, Jesus comes and stands with us. He said, "Peace be with you" twice. Jesus wants us to let go of the anxiety that accompanies our narrow plans for life. We do not need to solve all the world's problems or make everything as it was. Why not? Because "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." The Way is already laid out. God has been creatively unfolding life since Day 1; disciples must simply join in. And if we are not sure what to do, Jesus "breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you retain are retained.'" Note that there are not just apostles in the room; the forgiveness Jesus refers to is more than the forgiveness of the confessional. The task of all Christians is to heal wounds and reunite divisions. Nothing more, nothing less.

Can we imagine ourselves doing this, being at peace, while God drives the bus and we concentrate all our energies on forgiveness? We protest that we have to earn a living or raise children or that we have no divisions to heal. Paul tells us in 1Corinthians, "we were all given to drink of one Spirit." We all have different "gifts," "forms of service" and "workings," but the source is the same Spirit and the aim is the same, forgiveness. We must each do this in the place God has put us. "To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit." While we all know what the Spirit wants of priests, we must prayerfully figure out what God wants of us.

Ah, but these are uncharted waters! First, we worry that we need clergy approval. This is not anarchy, but rather throwing off sluggishness. On the first Pentecost, a mixture of disciples were gathered in one place and when the Spirit descended, all were filled. We can trust our choices if they lead to the forgiveness with which Jesus inspired the disciples in the upper room. Is what I am doing healing divisions and wounds? Yes, then, keep it up! Is it creating more wounds and divisions? Yes, then, knock it off! Second, we may fear that we do not know how to begin. Peace be with you! The Holy Spirit fills the entire house with fresh air! The Spirit's fire is a love like the Burning Bush, always creative and life-giving. If we pay attention to it moving in us, we will find ourselves speaking a new language that can reach people. In Acts, each disciple spoke a different language to reach different people in the crowd. No one disciple could reach everyone but each disciple could reach someone. If you have business skills, how can you use them to heal the wounds of poverty and debt for others? If you are good with people, how can you reach out to the lonely? Good at sales? How can you help the Church spread the Good News? The pandemic has forced us reassess our priorities; God is giving us an opportunity to change the world, just as the disciples did that first Pentecost.

- ❖ Where do you see a need for forgiveness in your life? What can you do about it?
- ❖ Besides your parish's virtual mass, how has the Spirit been "doing Church" in your life lately?

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