

Pentecost 2019 SSP

Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21; St John 14:8-27

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

When I was a kid, and even every once in a while to this day, I didn't much care for the great exchange at the end of Eastertide – the exchange that occurs between the Ascension and the Day of Pentecost. I thought, this is not a good deal. Jesus goes up, the Spirit comes down. God gets Jesus, we get the Church. No sir, not a good deal at all.

Let's back up to Good Friday and Easter morning and see how we got here. The disciples were appalled by the cross, as we would have been and in fact still are. It is the embracing of the cross of Christ as the Best Good News There Is that constitutes the life's work of the Christian. The disciples, even though Jesus had forecast his death, were stupefied. So much so, that they were slow, especially the men except for John, to believe that God raised Jesus from his grave – even though Jesus had forecast that as well. It was too much for them to take in.

Throughout the first Eastertide, in many ways, Jesus made his Resurrection known to his followers. He called them by name (as with Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter and Thomas). He showed them his wounds (as in the Upper Room, especially with Thomas). He ate in their presence; in fact he prepared a charcoal fire for them by the Sea of Galilee. He walked distances with them. He opened the Scriptures for them (can you imagine taking that Bible study on the road to Emmaus?) He healed them (especially Peter). He wasn't a ghost, and he wasn't a resuscitated corpse brought back into this life, like Lazarus. This was a new reality for a new world. Although his Resurrection was certainly bodily, it was also spiritual – the doors were

locked but Jesus simply appeared; and at Emmaus, he vanished when they recognized him. And so forth. But this period came to an end.

It had to come to an end. Why? Because the Church would never have spread the word otherwise. During that first Eastertide, the disciples of Jesus were a circle of people looking inward at the center, at the risen Lord, whose Resurrected Bodily Presence overawed them. So what happened? On Ascension Day he removed himself from the center of that circle.

But it couldn't stop there. Jesus had told them he would send them power from on high, and that they were to wait for its coming. Or should I say, as Jesus did, wait for His coming; and who is that? "I will send you another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to be with you forever." The Greek word in John's Gospel, translated Comforter, Advocate, Counselor, Strengthener, is *Parakletos*, almost impossible to translate, except that we have a good term in the Anglican/Episcopal tradition: Vicar! A Vicar is the Bishop's appointed priest in an aided parish. He, or she, represents the Bishop there. The Holy Spirit is Jesus's Vicar in the holy catholic Church. Jesus is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, and the Holy Spirit is his Vicar, the universal Vicar of Christ.

So when Jesus withdrew by ascending into highest, or if you prefer, deepest heaven, he did not leave that circle of meek little people powerless. He sent the power. Here's another Greek word, from Saint Luke's Book of Acts: *Dunamis*. As in dynamo or even dynamite. Kaboom! That circle of meek little people, turned inside out by the descending Spirit with wind and fire, came bundling down the stairs from the Upper Room into the streets of Jerusalem, where Peter preached the first explicit sermon of Jesus Christ to the world – after the disciples were heard speaking God's praises in the various languages of the pilgrims on the Feast of Weeks in Jerusalem. Even the Medes were there and heard it.

Speaking of Peter, recall that fifty days earlier this was the man who denied Christ and swore he didn't know Jesus. The same old power structure before whom Peter had cowered was still in place: the high priests, the council, Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate... Yet look at the difference. Dynamite. Here, the Holy Spirit had transformed the Apostle truly into a Vicar of Christ. And that is why the exchange of Ascension and Pentecost is, after all, not a bad deal at all, but a very good deal. We certainly would not know about Jesus otherwise.

So where is our Pentecost at Saint Stephen's Providence? Right here, now. Have you ever noticed that what goes on here today, and for that matter at every mass, has the same shape as Good Friday/Easter/Ascension/Pentecost? We gather together to bless and break and share the Bread and the Cup, thereby showing forth the Lord's Death. We eat and drink his living Body and Blood by the power of his Resurrection. But we don't just stay here, a circle facing inward, facing the altar and the tabernacle. Our circle is turned inside out. We are told to get out of here, to go in peace to love and serve the Lord, to rejoice in the power of the Spirit, who goes with us wherever we go. And what a great name for our city, Providence. For it is the Holy Spirit who guides our steps, who changes life from the cynic's view of life as "one damn thing after another" into an adventure in God's providence by pilgrims heavenward bound.

Today we are going to have a forum with Canon Linda Grenz, who will help us set some things in order in our hearts and minds, so that we are not stuck in the past but rather freed and empowered for mission in the here and now and the future. If there needs to be some healing, let it be so. But let all things be accompanied by prayer and thanksgiving. Saint Stephen's is a breath-takingly beautiful sanctuary of Christ with a lovely tradition to be developed, strengthened and carried forward; which by God's grace, by the dynamo of the Holy Spirit, we shall do. And what a mission setting Saint Stephen's has been given! Do we have a parking

problem? Yes, and the two churches I was in for thirty years have even worse parking problems. Perhaps the problem defines a mission question for us: Who doesn't need to drive here in order to walk through our doors and take part in our Eucharist? Hmm. If even a tiny percentage of those souls were to do so, we wouldn't be able to seat them all. So by the power of the Spirit let's hop to it, and make our various witnesses for Jesus. [And invite people to join you in church.]

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.