

Pentecost Sunday

RCL: Acts 2:1-21 or Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b;
1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 or Acts 2:1-21; John 20:19-23 or
John 7:37-39

LM: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23

Everyone twittered. I read the passage in English. Then María, from Paraguay, read the passage in Spanish. Twitters arose in the congregation. Andreas, from Germany, also read the Scripture. More twittering. It was a bit disconcerting to us! After all, we sat through worship every Sunday listening to words in a tongue we did not understand. But in a way we understood very well what was being said. It was Pentecost in Bolenge, Zaire (now Congo), and the pastor wanted the people to experience Acts 2:1-21 in different tongues

I had done the same thing in the States, that is, read the Scriptures in different languages. But what a difference it made when I was in the minority. It was quite humbling to experience that twittering. In retrospect, it was like God's presence at Sinai for me. Inspired speaking and hearing happened in that place, changing my usual inattention into rapt attention as the Spirit spoke to me. God's deeds of power were all around me. Power was in the wake I had attended for a small baby the previous night. Power was in the AIDS patient for whom I was cooking food, attempting to bring her some comfort in her final days. Power was in the seemingly inane teaching of English to the young people, many of whom would never leave this place of jungle heat and abject poverty.

What does all this mean? It was a question that the amazed and perplexed people asked on the day of the first Pentecost, a question that we all need to ask again in our own day. May inattention to the Spirit become rapt attention to the Spirit. The prophet Joel had it right in seeing the last days as Spirit-filled ones. Did you read the words "upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17)? The Spirit will reside in sons and daughters, in old men and young men, in slaves of both genders! The Church's exclusivity is challenged and thankfully broken at Pentecost, offering instead the Spirit's inclusivity. Well, it's about time we jumped on board the Spirit Wagon! The message for the early Church resounds in our ears today as the Church is called to include all races, socio-economic circles, genders, children, gays, and lesbians.

Everyone understood the tongues, each in his or her own language. The language of the Spirit is one we all can understand. Peter's sermon focuses on renewal and on prophecy, urging the people to shun corruption, themes that fit for us today.

I attended a Bread for the World national gathering in June 2001 at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. The prophetic words I heard and the relationships I experienced moved me. No longer would I be about "business as usual" in my North American mindset. I heard from Africans, Europeans, South Americans, North Americans—each in his or her own tongue—and I understood the Spirit. The modern-day prophets prophesied about drought, hunger, and disease, and described what I could do about them. They urged me to "repent," to turn around and go the other way. For me, that meant a lifestyle change and a Spirit-change. I admitted that I had become too attached to my house and car. I fasted more, rode my bike and took the bus more often, and spent time with my local Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice, where many people from across the globe gathered.

I hope everyone can have a “Pentecost” experience, whether big or little, dramatic or quiet. Be open to the Spirit in your life. Pentecost is a liturgical season that lends itself to focus on this “Person” of the Trinity. In all you do, hit your knees, seek humility, and “let go.” Attention to the Spirit will change your life.

Prayer: God, send your Spirit again, powerfully, among us in all our diversity, so that we might experience your life-giving, unifying breath. Amen.

Children's Time

Focus: Acts 2:1-21

From construction paper cut out tongues of fire to give the children as they enter. Ask different people, in advance, to be prepared to emphatically say “Receive the Holy Spirit” in different languages. When you ask, have them say:

“Receive the Holy Spirit!” (English)

“Recibe el Espíritu Santo!” (Spanish)

“Recevez le Saint-Esprit!” (French)

Include other languages that congregants may know.

Then say to the children: “Wow! Isn’t it great to hear the differences in languages? I sure like them! Remember how we have been talking about Jesus’ followers receiving the Holy Spirit. We’ve been waiting! They’ve been waiting! Today’s the DAY! Everyone was together in one place. And suddenly a big wind came up. Let’s make the sound of a big wind [Have the children blow.] The wind filled the whole room. Next, tongues of fire rested on each person present! Hold your paper tongue over your head! [Have one for yourself to demonstrate and have the children follow your lead.]

“The Holy Spirit filled these early Christians. Everyone started to speak in different languages, just as our friends did earlier. All this was amazing! But more amazing was that everyone heard in his or her own native language. Everyone spoke! Everyone heard! Everyone understood! Now that’s what was amazing!

“Today the Church is big, having spread around the world. We are Christians because the early Christians, who were once afraid of sharing the Good News, received the Holy Spirit, which gave them the power to do God’s work. Now in our day and time, it is just as important to share our faith. How might we talk about Jesus with our friends? [Invite answers.] Great! Let’s do these things! Today we say it’s the Church’s birthday, when people came out from behind locked doors with courage and Spirit to share the Good News! Let’s pray!”

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the early Christians. They spoke! They heard! They understood, and then went and told others! Alleluia! Amen!